



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 19 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:33 P.M., 19 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	9		
BUSINESS AND TRADE	9		
■ Arms Trade: Export Controls	9	■ Department for Business and Trade: Redundancy Pay	15
■ British Business Bank: Finance	9	■ Department for Business and Trade: Special Advisers	15
■ Business: Billing and Disability	9	■ Department for Business and Trade: Training	15
■ Business: Government Assistance	10	■ Department for Business and Trade: Visits Abroad	15
■ Business: Investment	10	■ Electric Vehicles: China	16
■ Business: Regulation	10	■ Exports: Ukraine	16
■ Company Accounts: Fines	11	■ Fireworks	17
■ Construction: Industry	11	■ Flexible Working	18
■ Consumer Goods: Safety	12	■ Horizon IT System	18
■ Delivery Services: Fast Food	12	■ Hospitality Industry: Government Assistance	19
■ Department for Business and Trade: Aviation	13	■ Iron and Steel: Antidumping Duties	19
■ Department for Business and Trade: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	13	■ Locksmiths: Industry	19
■ Department for Business and Trade: Mobile Phones	13	■ Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries	20
■ Department for Business and Trade: Northern Ireland	14	■ Nightclubs: Closures	20
■ Department for Business and Trade: Official Cars	14	■ Nissan	21
		■ Personal Care Services: Finance	21
		■ Post Offices: Bank Services	22
		■ Post Offices: Closures	22

■ Post Offices: Closures and Franchises	22
■ Post Offices: Financial Services	23
■ Retail Trade: Urban Areas	23
■ Rural Areas	24
■ Small Businesses	24
■ Small Businesses: Billing	24
■ Small Businesses: Exports	25
■ Small Businesses: UK Trade with EU	26
■ Stellantis	26
■ Toys and Games: Safety	26
■ Trade Agreements	27
■ Trade Agreements: Colombia	27
■ Trade Agreements: USA	27
■ Trade: Fairtrade Initiative	28
■ UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland	28
■ Urban Areas: Government Assistance	28
■ Vodafone Group: Coronavirus	29
CABINET OFFICE	29
■ Cabinet Office: Disclosure of Information	29
■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission	29
■ Department for Business and Trade: Senior Civil Servants	30
■ Foreign Investment in UK: National Security	30
■ National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority: Departmental Responsibilities	31
■ Trade Agreements: EU Countries	31

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	31
■ Archbishops: Termination of Employment	31
■ Cemeteries: County Durham	32
■ Marriage: Relatives	32
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	33
■ British Film Institute	33
■ Cathedrals: Hereford and Lichfield	34
■ Film and Television: Buildings	34
■ Football	34
■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme	35
■ Music Venues: Liverpool	35
■ Olympic Games: Finance	36
■ Voluntary Work: Prizes	36
DEFENCE	36
■ Armed Forces: Private Education	36
■ Armed Forces: Recruitment	37
■ Army: Vehicles	37
■ Defence Equipment: Expenditure	37
■ Defence: Expenditure	38
■ Defence: Manufacturing Industries	38
■ Defence: Procurement	38
■ Global Combat Air Programme	40
■ Guided Weapons	42
■ Ministry of Defence: Capita	42
■ Ministry of Defence: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	42
■ Ministry of Defence: Employers' Contributions	43
■ Ministry of Defence: Ministers' Private Offices	43

■ National Armaments Director	43	■ Postgraduate Education: Students	59
■ Nuclear Weapons	44	■ Pre-school Education: Finance	60
■ Poland: Guided Weapons	44	■ Pre-school Education: Standards	61
■ Poland: NATO	44	■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs	62
■ Shipbuilding: Appledore Shipyard and Belfast	44	■ Schools: Dental Health	63
■ Sky Sabre	45	■ Schools: Finance	64
■ Torpedoes: Procurement	45	■ Schools: Great Yarmouth	64
■ Ukraine: Military Aid	45	■ Schools: Per Capita Costs	65
■ Warships: Crew	48	■ Schools: Transport	65
EDUCATION	48	■ Shipping: Vocational Guidance	66
■ Adult Education: Cornwall	48	■ Sixth Form Colleges: Pay	67
■ Apprentices: Finance	49	■ Special Educational Needs: Unemployment	68
■ Carers: Finance	50	■ Students: Loans	70
■ Children: Care Homes	50	■ T-levels: Student Wastage	70
■ Children: Care Homes and Foster Care	51	■ Universities: China	71
■ Curriculum and Assessment Review	52	■ Young People: Unemployment	71
■ Department for Education: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	52	ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	72
■ Department for Education: Staff	53	■ Carbon Capture and Storage and Hydrogen: Finance	72
■ Education and Unemployment: Liverpool Walton	53	■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Alcoholic Drinks	73
■ Educational Institutions: Staff	54	■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	73
■ Educational Psychology: Labour Turnover	56	■ Drax Power: Disclosure of Information	73
■ Free School Meals: Finance	56	■ Energy Supply	74
■ Further Education and Universities: Finance	57	■ Energy: Conservation	75
■ Further Education: Bus Services	57	■ Nuclear Power Stations: Migrant Workers	75
■ Further Education: Pay	58		
■ Home Education: Registration	59		

■ Renewable Energy	76	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	87
■ Renewable Energy: Northern Ireland	76	■ Afghanistan: Women	87
■ Renewable Energy: Prices	76	■ BBC World Service: Foreign Relations	87
■ Sizewell C Power Station: Finance	77	■ Belarus: Sanctions	88
■ Warm Homes Plan: Insulation	77	■ China: Falun Gong	88
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	78	■ China: Taiwan	88
■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]	78	■ China: Water Supply	89
■ Agriculture: Finance	78	■ Colombia: Peace Negotiations	89
■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	78	■ Colombia: Trade Unions	90
■ Agriculture: Subsidies	79	■ Deserts	90
■ BSE	79	■ Development Aid: Children's Rights	91
■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	80	■ Development Aid: Reviews	91
■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Staff	80	■ Diplomatic Service	92
■ Farmers: Advisory Services	81	■ Fawaz Akhras	92
■ Farms: Floods	81	■ Fuel Oil: Prices	93
■ Flood Control: Finance	82	■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance	93
■ Flood Control: Independent Water Commission	83	■ Gaza: Defence Equipment	93
■ Flood Control: Rural Areas	83	■ Gaza: Health Professions	95
■ Food Supply	84	■ Gaza: Humanitarian Aid	95
■ Food Supply: Biodiversity	84	■ Gaza: Israel Defense Forces	96
■ Food: Public Sector	84	■ Gaza: Journalism	97
■ Foot and Mouth Disease	84	■ Gaza: Journalism and Press Freedom	97
■ Planning Permission: Air Pollution	85	■ Gaza: Unmanned Air Vehicles	98
■ River Grom: Flood Control	85	■ Gaza: UNRWA	99
■ Rivers: Standards	86	■ Hong Kong: National Security	100
■ Transport: Storms	86	■ Hong Kong: Official Secrets	100
		■ International Assistance	101
		■ Iran: Christianity	101
		■ Iran: Human Rights	101
		■ Israel: Foreign Relations	102

■ Israel: Gaza	102	■ Hospitals: Admissions	117
■ Israel: International Law	103	■ NHS: Negligence	117
■ School Meals Coalition	103	■ Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy	118
■ Syria: Armed Conflict	103	■ Preventive Medicine and Public Health: Youth Services	118
■ Syria: Development Aid	104	■ Primodos: Research	119
■ Syria: Religious Freedom	104	■ Processed Food	119
■ Taiwan: Security	104	■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening	120
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	105	■ Skin Diseases: Steroid Drugs	120
■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Gloucestershire	105	■ Smoking: Public Houses	121
■ Alzheimer's Disease: Drugs	105	■ Sports: Medicine	122
■ Blood Cancer: Romford	106	■ Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme	122
■ Bowel Cancer: Diagnosis	107	HOME OFFICE	122
■ Bowel Cancer: Health Education	107	■ Asylum: Contracts	122
■ Breast Cancer: Research	108	■ Border Security Command: Staff	125
■ Cancer: Children and Young People	108	■ Dangerous Driving: West Bromwich	125
■ Cancer: Research	109	■ Electric Vehicles: Batteries	126
■ Cancer: Young People	109	■ Fire and Rescue Services: Unmanned Air Vehicles	126
■ Change NHS: Costs	110	■ Foreign Influence Registration Scheme	127
■ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Health Services	110	■ Knives: Crime	127
■ Colchester Hospital: Staff	111	■ Migrants: Detainees	128
■ Department of Health and Social Care: Correspondence	111	■ Mohamed Iidow	128
■ Diagnosis and Medical Equipment	112	■ Motor Vehicles: Theft	128
■ Dietetics: Apprentices	113	■ Overseas Students: Ukraine	129
■ Drugs: Newbury	113	■ Police: Unmanned Air Vehicles	129
■ Drugs: Shortages	114	■ Refugees: Employment	130
■ Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Diagnosis	114	■ Resettlement: Afghanistan	130
■ Health: Disadvantaged	115		
■ Heart Diseases: Young People	116		

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	131	NORTHERN IRELAND	141
■ Buildings: Insulation	131	■ European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill	141
■ Buildings: Repairs and Maintenance	131	■ Northern Ireland Office: Media	141
■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission	132	■ Northern Ireland Office: Ministers' Private Offices	141
■ Community Ownership Fund	132	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	141
■ Elections: Proof of Identity	133	■ Electronic Government	141
■ Elections: Warwickshire	133	■ Innovation and New Businesses: Rural Areas	142
■ Homelessness: Young People	133	■ Project Gigabit: West Worcestershire	142
■ INTERREG Programme	134	SCOTLAND	143
■ Mayors: Elections	135	■ Public Transport: Paisley and Renfrewshire North	143
■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Alcoholic Drinks	135	■ Scotland Office: Media	143
■ Parking: Regulation	135	■ Scotland Office: Ministers' Private Offices	143
■ Regional Planning and Development: Finance	135	SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY	144
■ Retail Trade: Essex	136	■ Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority: Ex Gratia Payments	144
■ Shops: Greater London	136	■ Members: Allowances	144
■ Social Rented Housing: Wolverhampton	137	TRANSPORT	145
■ Temporary Accommodation	137	■ A14: Accidents	145
■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund	139	■ A226: Repairs and Maintenance	145
JUSTICE	139	■ Aviation	145
■ Homicide: Sentencing	139	■ Bus Services	146
■ Legal Profession: Money Laundering	139	■ Bus Services: Disability	146
■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals	140	■ Bus Services: ICT	147
LEADER OF THE HOUSE	140	■ Buses: Exhaust Emissions	147
■ Written Questions: Government Responses	140	■ Cycling: Safety	147

■ Dangerous Driving: West Midlands	148	■ Seafarers' Charter: Shipping	160
■ Department for Transport: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	148	■ Shipping: Carbon Emissions	161
■ Department for Transport: Ministers' Private Offices	148	■ Shipping: Ports and Territorial Waters	161
■ Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Equality	149	■ Shipping: Training	161
■ Driving Tests	149	■ Taxis	161
■ Euston Station: Passengers	149	■ Taxis: Conditions of Employment	162
■ High Speed 2 Line: Construction	150	■ Tonnage Tax: Registration	162
■ High Speed 2 Line: Costs	150	■ Unmanned Air Vehicles	163
■ High Speed 2 Line: Worcestershire	151	TREASURY	164
■ Maritime and Coastguard Agency: Equality	151	■ Cancer: Medical Treatments	164
■ Merchant Shipping: Public Consultation	151	■ Civil Society: Employers' Contributions	164
■ Merseyrail: Nationalisation	152	■ Companies: Registration	165
■ Motor Insurance: Ethnic Groups	152	■ Cryptocurrencies	165
■ Motor Vehicles: Registration	153	■ Financial Services Compensation Scheme	166
■ Motor Vehicles: Theft	153	■ Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law	166
■ Motorcycles: Driving Licences	156	■ Innovation: Finance	166
■ Motorcycles: Safety	157	■ Mandatory Provident Fund: British National (Overseas)	167
■ Motorcycles: Sales	157	■ Mortgages	167
■ Passenger Transport Executives	157	■ Nurseries: Business Rates	168
■ Railways: Accidents	158	■ Offshore Industry: Finance	168
■ Railways: Dawlish	159	■ Private Education: VAT	169
■ Railways: Employers' Contributions	159	■ Property: Valuation	169
■ Railways: Wythall	160	■ Public Sector: Collective Bargaining	170
■ Roads: South East	160	■ Research: Finance	170
		■ Social Services: Finance	171
		■ Tax Avoidance	171
		■ Treasury: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	171

■ UK Infrastructure Bank: Women	172	■ Pension Credit: Armed Forces Compensation Scheme	181
WALES	172	■ Pension Credit: South Devon	181
■ Wales Office: Ministers' Private Offices	172	■ Pensions	182
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	172	■ Poverty: Leicester	182
■ Carers: Conditions of Employment	172	■ Poverty: Older People	183
■ Discrimination	173	■ State Retirement Pensions: Leicester	184
■ Discrimination: Social Media	173	■ State Retirement Pensions: Women	185
■ Paternity Leave	174	■ Unemployment: Young People	185
WORK AND PENSIONS	174	WRITTEN STATEMENTS	186
■ Carers: Employment	174	BUSINESS AND TRADE	186
■ Child Maintenance Service	175	■ Future of Harland and Wolff	186
■ Children: Maintenance	175	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	186
■ Department for Work and Pensions: Buildings	176	■ Price Review 2024 Final Determinations	186
■ Department for Work and Pensions: Ministers' Private Offices	176	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	188
■ Employment: Disability	176	■ Hospices	188
■ Employment: Young People	177	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	189
■ Financial Services: Education	178	■ Compulsory Purchase Reforms	189
■ Jobcentres: Assistive Technology	178	WORK AND PENSIONS	190
■ Older People: Poplar and Limehouse	178	■ British Sign Language (BSL) Report 2023 – 2024	190
■ Pension Credit	180		

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

■ Arms Trade: Export Controls

Dave Doogan:

[\[15507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for arms export licences of the International Criminal Court arrest warrant for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu and (b) Yoav Gallant.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK respects the independence of the International Criminal Court in investigating the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We have been clear that all parties must comply with International Humanitarian Law and take every possible step to minimise harm to civilians. The relevant licences remain suspended and the Government's IHL assessment process continues to gather information from a wide range of sources, including statements from the UN, NGOs, and other organisations.

■ British Business Bank: Finance

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many applications for loans to the British Business Bank were made between July and November 2024.

Gareth Thomas:

Data from the British Business Bank's Start Up Loans programme should be publicly available in 2025. Other loan applications for British Business Bank products are managed through delivery partners, such as banks, leasing companies, venture capital funds and web-based platforms.

■ Business: Billing and Disability

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what consultation was undertaken before publication of the (a) Fair Payment and (b) Disability Finance Code.

Gareth Thomas:

A new Fair Payment Code which is more credible, enforceable, and ambitious was launched earlier this month to replace the former Prompt Payment Code. This followed feedback from small business stakeholder groups, including Federation of Small Businesses, Enterprise Nation and others.

The Disability Finance Code for Entrepreneurship has been led in partnership with founding signatories: Barclays, HSBC UK, Lloyds Banking Group and NatWest, alongside delivery partners, UK Finance and the British Business Bank. This forms

part of the government backed Lilac Review led by Small Business Britain which is examining ways to address barriers facing disabled entrepreneurs.

■ Business: Government Assistance

Andrew Griffith: [\[19436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to update the guidance on the UK subsidy control regime.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade keeps guidance on the subsidy control regime under regular review. The last substantive update to the statutory guidance was in December 2023 and the next update is planned for early 2025. The Department has also recently published two new guides to assist public authorities in completing subsidy control principles assessments.

Andrew Griffith: [\[19437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many searches have been made on his Department's subsidy database since July 2024.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade does not have data for completed searches for this period. However, following recent improvements to the Department's analytical capabilities, numbers of searches on the database will be available for periods starting on or after 1 December 2024.

■ Business: Investment

Matt Vickers: [\[19881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to encourage business confidence.

Gareth Thomas:

Growth is the number one mission of the Government and we will continue to work with and listen carefully to the business community. In the Budget, the Government was forced to make difficult choices to plug the black hole in the Government's finances, but the fundamentals for doing business in the UK remains strong. The Government has already taken steps to strengthen business and investor confidence through, reforming the planning system, getting people back to work and creating the growth and skills levy. DBT is driving long term, inclusive growth through our Industrial Strategy, Trade Strategy, Small Business Strategy and Plan to Make Work Pay.

■ Business: Regulation

Matt Vickers: [\[19878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to reduce regulation for businesses.

Justin Madders:

The Government is determined to kick-start economic growth, which is why it is essential that we identify areas where the costs of regulations may be unnecessarily high and burdensome for businesses. This is why the Department is developing an ambitious regulatory reform agenda to ensure that any future regulation, or reforms to regulation, work for businesses, consumers and supports the Government's growth mission. As part of this, we are working across government to identify regulatory reforms that will support the Industrial Strategy. Our proposals will be set out in due course.

■ Company Accounts: Fines**Phil Brickell:**[\[19931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much the late filing penalties from companies failing to file their annual accounts within the deadline were in each financial year between 2018-19 and 2023-24.

Justin Madders:

Official statistics on the value of collected late filing penalties are published in the annual report of Companies House. We have excerpted and reproduced the relevant figures for companies failing to file their annual accounts within the deadline below:

2018-19	£95,972,000
2019-20	£95,728,000
2020-21	£96,695,000
2021-22	£173,673,825
2022-23	£164,663,042
2023-24	£158,479,669

Expenditure for the LFP scheme activity is not funded through fees. Penalties collected in respect of company accounts filed late with Companies House are paid to HMT, net of costs incurred in running the scheme.

■ Construction: Industry**Andrew Griffith:**[\[19446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the minutes of the meeting of the Consultative Committee on Construction Industry Statistics on 28 October 2024, published on 2 December 2024.

Sarah Jones:

The Consultative Committee on Construction Industry Statistics (CCCIS) is a long running forum for producers and users of official statistics on construction to engage

with expert users. The meetings are chaired by the Department for Business and Trade, and include cross-government statisticians, representatives of industry bodies and academics. Information from discussions at the meeting in October will contribute to improving the reliability of official statistics on the construction sector and drive policy development, alongside engagement with key stakeholders and evidence gathering.

■ **Consumer Goods: Safety**

Robin Swann: [\[20542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had discussions with online sales platforms on guidance on implementation of the General Product Safety Regulation.

Justin Madders:

Ministerial colleagues in the Department and I undertake regular engagement with businesses, including online marketplaces and those who sell products online, to listen to their concerns.

In addition, officials in my Department have regular discussions with business representatives, including online marketplaces and businesses that sell products online, on a range of issues, including the new General Product Safety Regulations. This engagement allows businesses to raise specific issues directly with the Government.

■ **Delivery Services: Fast Food**

Neil Coyle: [\[20216\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking with (a) Deliveroo, (b) Uber Eats and (c) Just Eat to end the contracting-out of their workforce accounts for use by people illegally working in the UK.

Justin Madders:

The Government is alert to the risks associated with substitution in the platform economy, particularly the role it can play in facilitating illegal working by irregular migrants.

I met recently with the Minister for Border Security and Asylum and the Director of Labour Market Enforcement to discuss this.

We are looking closely at the extent to which Deliveroo, Uber Eats and Just Eat have implemented the commitments they made earlier this year to implement systems to conduct right to work checks on substitute riders, and I have recently written to them seeking further detail on how this is operating in practice.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Aviation**Andrew Griffith:**[\[20517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many (a) commercial and (b) non-commercial flights he has taken since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

We can confirm that since 5 July 2024, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has taken:

28 commercial flights

1 non-commercial flight

■ Department for Business and Trade: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Emily Thornberry:**[\[19657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) his core Department and its predecessor departments and (b) executive agencies of those departments at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Justin Madders:

UKSBS have confirmed the following numbers of government procurement cards were held by the Department for Business and Trade/Department for International Trade:

DEPARTMENT	YEAR	GPC CARDS HELD
Department for Business and Trade/Department for International Trade	2023	211
Department for International Trade	2022	171

UKSBS have confirmed that totals for executive agencies are not held.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Mobile Phones**Alison Griffiths:**[\[20538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many mobile phones procured for use by his Department have been (a) lost and (b) stolen in each of the last 12 months.

Justin Madders:

DATE	LOST PHONE	STOLEN PHONE
Dec-23	12	3
Jan-24	17	0
Feb-24	12	2
Mar-24	13	0
Apr-24	19	0
May-24	16	2
Jun-24	11	4
Jul-24	10	3
Aug-24	14	0
Sep-24	14	1
Oct-24	20	2
Nov-24	18	3
Dec-24	7	2
Total (Jan 24- Dec 24)	171	19

■ Department for Business and Trade: Northern Ireland

Alison Griffiths:

[\[20537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many visits (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have made to Northern Ireland since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

As of 17 December, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and his ministerial team have not yet visited Northern Ireland, but plan to do so in the upcoming months.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Official Cars

Alison Griffiths:

[\[20536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many ministerial (a) cars and (b) drivers his Department has use of.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade contracts 3 Ministerial cars, each with a team of two drivers and six in total.

Alison Griffiths:

[\[20539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many trips by ministerial car Ministers in his Department have taken since 5 July.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade does not hold data on the number of trips by ministerial car and to provide this could only be done at disproportionate cost.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Redundancy Pay**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[20523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many (a) settlement agreements and (b) special severance payments with (i) current and (ii) former employees his Department has made in each of the last 12 months.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade made no settlement agreements or special severance payments in the last 12 months for either current or former employees.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Special Advisers**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to appoint any additional Special Advisers.

Justin Madders:

Currently, the Secretary of State has no plans to appoint additional Special Advisors.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Training**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[20528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many away days or off-site team building exercises his Department has arranged for officials in each month of this year; and what the cost of these was.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade does not routinely collect this information. It could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Visits Abroad**

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[20207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many international trips Ministers in his Department have undertaken since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

Since 5th July 2024, Ministers within the Department for Business and Trade have undertaken 22 international trips.

Alison Griffiths:

[\[20535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many officials have been sent on foreign visits by his Department since 5 July 2024; and what the cost to the public purse was of these visits.

Justin Madders:

Since 5th July 2024, the Department for Business and Trade has sent 838 officials on foreign visits at a total cost of £1,632,898.02.

■ Electric Vehicles: China

Mr Connor Rand:

[\[18758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with European counterparts on joining the EU in applying tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

This government is continuing to work closely with EU partners to identify areas to strengthen cooperation, including the economy, energy, security and resilience.

The government will take a consistent, long-term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in the national interest. It is for the independent Trade Remedies Authority to investigate whether trade remedy measures are needed to protect our industries, and any action taken on Chinese electric vehicles imports has to be the right one for UK industry.

The government is in close contact with the sector about this and wider issues, including the recent announcement of over £2 billion of capital and R&D funding to 2030 for zero emission vehicle manufacturing and their supply chains

■ Exports: Ukraine

Stephen Gethins:

[\[20217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024 to Question 13191 on Exports: Ukraine, which Departments he is waiting to receive advice on before concluding this export licence application; and what steps his Department is taking to hasten advice.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) is comprised of experts in the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The FCDO advises DBT on the situation in country and the risks this poses with respect to the UK's export control responsibilities. The MOD advises DBT on the risks of diversion of exported goods and national security risks arising from hostile state activity. As the decision-making authority for all export licensing decisions DBT takes advice from both Departments and is in daily contact with them where necessary to ensure that process happens as quickly as possible.

Exporters are advised in the first instance to contact the ECJU Licensing Unit, as they will be able to provide further updates on the progress of their applications and comment on any specific cases they would like to raise.

Stephen Gethins:

[\[20218\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many export licence applications related to Ukraine are still being assessed (a) three months and (b) six months after submission.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The processing of all export licence applications to Ukraine is being prioritised by ECJU. Within that process, applications for the export of equipment organised between the UK Government and the government of Ukraine through Ministry of Defence procurement mechanisms are given the highest priority.

As with all export licence applications, assessments are made on a case-by-case basis according to the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. Assessments for Ukraine, given the situation within the country and the nature of the goods often being exported, mean these cases are some of the most complex for ECJU to process. Therefore, some can take longer to process than our public targets (to conclude 70% of standard individual export licence (SIEL) applications within 20 working days and 99% within 60 working days).

The volume of live applications changes daily, but the Government release statistics on export licensing decisions and processing times regularly and these can be broken down by end destination. The most recent statistics cover the period April to June 2024 and were published on 12 December. In that period, 36 (72%) SIELs for Ukraine were responded to within 20 working days and 45 (90%) were responded to within 60 working days.

■ Fireworks

Graham Leadbitter:

[\[20101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions his Department has had with the Scottish Government on revisions to firework safety legislation to include provisions on (a) community safety and (b) noise-level controls.

Graham Leadbitter:

[\[20102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to protect (a) wildlife parks and (b) zoos from the impact of firework usage.

Justin Madders:

The Government regularly engages with its counterparts in Scotland on fireworks. These discussions include antisocial use and the impact of noise. 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.

No assessment has been made in bringing forward legislative proposals to protect wildlife parks and zoos from the impacts of fireworks. To inform any future decisions on fireworks policy I intend to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities to gather evidence on the issues and impacts with fireworks, including on animal welfare.

■ Flexible Working

Laurence Turner: [R] [20334]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, which organisations are represented on his Department's Flexible Working Taskforce; and on what dates that taskforce has met.

Justin Madders:

The Flexible Working Taskforce last met on 26 Jan 2024. It was comprised of business groups, charities and trade unions and was co-chaired by the Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD) and the government. It met at regular intervals between 2018 and 2024.

The Government is committed to engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that policy works for businesses, workers, and the wider economy. That is why we continue to meet with stakeholders on a regular basis to discuss flexible working and related issues.

■ Horizon IT System

Andrew Griffith: [19431]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings he has had with representatives of sub-postmasters affected by failures of the Horizon Post Office IT system since July 2024.

Gareth Thomas:

The information requested will be released in the next publication of the transparency return. The latest version can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbt-ministerial-gifts-hospitality-overseas-travel-and-meetings>

Andrew Griffith: [19432]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had meetings with the prosecuting authorities in relation to the Horizon scandal since July 2024.

Gareth Thomas:

The information requested will be released in the next publication of the transparency return. The latest version can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbt-ministerial-gifts-hospitality-overseas-travel-and-meetings>

■ Hospitality Industry: Government Assistance

Matt Vickers:

[\[19880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support the hospitality sector.

Gareth Thomas:

Hospitality businesses are at the heart of our communities and are vital for economic growth.

This is why the Government is creating a fairer business rate system, reducing alcohol duty on qualifying draught products and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities. This work will be supported by the publication of The Small Business Strategy Command Paper next year.

Through the Hospitality Sector Council, we are addressing strategic issues for the sector related to high street regeneration, skills, sustainability, and productivity.

■ Iron and Steel: Antidumping Duties

Sarah Coombes:

[\[20318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with the the Chancellor of the Exchequer on retrospective steel safeguarding charges imposed on businesses.

Sarah Coombes:

[\[20319\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an estimate of the total costs incurred by businesses of steel safeguarding duties since the end of the UK-EU transition period.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Both the UK and EU separately apply a safeguard measure on certain categories of steel products. A safeguard measure protects domestic producers from injury as a result of unforeseen surges of imports. Both the UK and EU apply a 25% duty where import thresholds have been exceeded. HMRC may have the necessary data pertaining to any assessment of the total costs by businesses on the UK safeguard measure. However, since the expiry of the transition period an assessment has not been conducted. I will write to you on your question once my officials have consulted with HMRC.

■ Locksmiths: Industry

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the locksmith industry in upholding standards of practice.

Justin Madders:

The UK's framework for occupational regulation upholds public protection, whilst ensuring regulatory burdens on industry are proportionate. While the locksmithing

profession is not subject to statutory regulation, several self-regulating expert trade associations and accreditation schemes exist within the industry.

The Department for Business and Trade currently has no plans to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the locksmithing industry's upholding of standards of practice.

■ Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries

Liam Byrne:

[\[19243\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much private investment he expects from the additional funding allocated to the automotive sector in the next five years.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget committed over £2bn to 2030 for zero-emission vehicle manufacturing and their supply chains. This funding will build on previous ATF and APC programmes which have leveraged over £6bn of investment from the private sector so far. We will continue with this success, unlocking billions more in private investment to support our automotive industry. Further details will be announced as part of the industrial strategy.

Matt Vickers:

[\[19877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help safeguard jobs in the UK automotive supply chain.

Sarah Jones:

The automotive industry is an important part of the Government's plans for growth. Through our modern Industrial Strategy, we will support growth sectors to create high-quality, well-paid jobs across the country.

The Budget committed over £2 billion of capital and R&D funding to 2030 for zero emission vehicle manufacturing and their supply chains. Building on the achievements of the Automotive Transformation Fund and Advanced Propulsion Centre R&D programmes, we will launch a new initiative, kickstarting economic growth by supporting good jobs and productivity growth across the UK automotive sector. The Industrial Strategy will provide more details in the Spring.

■ Nightclubs: Closures

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[18963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help reduce the number of nightclub closures.

Gareth Thomas:

We recognise the important role night-time economy business plays in supporting local economies and communities. Healthy night-time economy businesses not only support our creative industries, including musicians, DJs and performance artists, but also support tourism and bolster day economy businesses.

The Government is creating a fairer business rate system, reducing alcohol duty on qualifying draught products and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities. All of these measures have been consistently demanded by the sector.

This work will be supported by the publication of The Small Business Strategy Command Paper next year.

■ Nissan

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[20204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, on what dates he has met with representatives of Nissan since 5 July 2024.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[20205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, on what dates he has met with representatives of Jaguar Land Rover since 5 July 2024.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[20206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, on what dates he has met with representatives of BMW since 5 July 2024.

Sarah Jones:

DBT Secretary of State regularly meets businesses including those in the automotive sector. These meetings are recorded in publicly available transparency data on the .GOV web site under 'DBT: Ministerial gifts, hospitality, overseas travel and meetings' which is being updated to include meetings since July.

■ Personal Care Services: Finance

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[19625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to meet representatives of the hair and beauty industry to discuss the potential impact of the Budget on their sector.

Justin Madders:

The Chancellor has been clear that the government must take difficult choices. This was a budget to fix the foundations of the economy, and these tough decisions are intended to provide a platform for growth.

I met with representatives from the sector at a Personal Care Roundtable on 19 November 2024. Representatives from the hospitality and personal care sector attended a Budget Broadcast call with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on 4 November 2024. There is ongoing engagement with the sector both at Ministerial and official level to understand the challenges facing the sector, including the impact of measures announced at Budget.

Details of ministerial meetings are published quarterly on gov.uk in line with transparency data releases and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbt-ministerial-gifts-hospitality-travel-and-meetings>.

■ Post Offices: Bank Services

Steve Darling: [19893]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of enhancing the banking offer within Post Offices.

Gareth Thomas:

Post Office continues to provide vital banking services through the Banking Framework to communities and businesses alike and protect access to cash for those who choose to use it. Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets, and is committed to championing sufficient access for all. Customers can pay in cash, pay cheques, make cash deposits, withdraw money and check their balance at all branches as well as at Banking Hubs operated by the Post Office. Government has committed to work closely with banks to roll out at least 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses across the country with critical cash and banking services.

■ Post Offices: Closures

Matt Vickers: [19875]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Post Office closures on local communities.

Gareth Thomas:

The UK Government is as committed as ever to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Post Office network. It is inevitable that with a network of this size, there will be variations in the number of branches open at any one time. As postmasters move on, branches close and new ones open. The Post Office Chair's recent announcement on the future of the Post Office has led to concerns around potential closures of Directly Managed Branches. However, no decisions have yet been taken on the future of any individual branch. While the Post Office network can fluctuate between areas and regions, the Post Office works with communities to consider how to best meet needs for Post Office services in a local area. The Government-set Access Criteria ensures that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

■ Post Offices: Closures and Franchises

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [19030]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support workers facing potential job loss in the event of Crown Post Office (a) closures and (b) franchising.

Gareth Thomas:

No decisions have yet been taken on the future of any Crown, or 'Directly Managed' Branches. Although staffing is an operational matter for the Post Office, we would expect any changes to be carried out in line with due process including engagement and consultation.

Post Office has committed to working with the unions to discuss the Chair's transformation plans over the next three months. A new Consultative Council will also be introduced to work with the Post Office on how these new plans are taken forward, to provide genuine challenge and to make sure the plans remain focused on the needs of postmasters and the communication they serve.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:[\[19032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if his Department will consult on the closure and franchising of Crown Post Offices.

Gareth Thomas:

No decisions regarding Crown, or 'Directly Managed' Branches, have been taken. The Post Office works with local communities to consider how to best meet needs for Post Office services in a local area. The Post Office will continue to deliver on the 11,500 minimum branch requirement set by Government.

■ Post Offices: Financial Services**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[19029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what financial services the Post Office provides at (a) Crown post offices and hosted Crown post offices, (b) franchise post offices, (c) Main post office, (d) Post Office Locals, (e) traditional sub-post office and (f) other types of post office branches.

Gareth Thomas:

Customers can deposit cash or cheques, withdraw money and check their balance at all the branch types listed as well as at Banking Hubs operated by the Post Office.

Customers can use the Post Office Branch Finder tool online to find out what services are available at their local branch.

■ Retail Trade: Urban Areas**Luke Taylor:**[\[20848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to take steps with local councils to help increase footfall on the high street.

Gareth Thomas:

Revitalising our high streets is a priority for this government. Improving footfall on the high street is essential to create strong high streets. The Secretary of State and I are working with MHCLG to consider how we can deliver a cross-government approach for high streets and supporting their businesses to thrive.

This means addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, working with the banking industry to roll out 350 banking hubs, reforming business rates, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network and reforming the apprenticeship levy.

Furthermore, the government is investing in local growth with local allocations for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2025-26 now announced, which places may choose to invest in rejuvenating high streets.

■ Rural Areas

Edward Morello: [\[17448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to help reduce transportation costs for (a) goods and (b) services in rural economies.

Gareth Thomas:

Rural areas offer significant potential for growth and are central to our economy. DBT works with other departments such as Defra, helping people living and working in rural areas to realise the full potential of rural businesses and communities placing them at the heart of our policymaking.

Our people-first focus will empower local leaders to make the best decisions for their regions, whether that is in rural or urban areas, by taking a place-based approach to transport. The Government has recently launched its plan to develop an Integrated National Transport Strategy, setting out how transport should be designed, built and operated.

■ Small Businesses

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[20202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when his Department plans to publish the small business strategy.

Gareth Thomas:

The government will publish its Small Business Strategy in 2025 after the Phase 2 Spending Review. This will set out the government's vision for supporting small businesses, from boosting scale-ups to growing the co-operative economy and across key policy areas.

■ Small Businesses: Billing

Andrew Griffith: [\[18414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what budget his Department has allocated to the creation of the award tiers as part of the new Fair Payment Code.

Gareth Thomas:

The Fair Payment Code is administered by the Office of Small Business Commissioner on behalf of the Department of Business and Trade. The Office of the Small Business Commissioner is grant in aid funded by the Department and in

2023/24 received £1.148m in grant funding. As had previously occurred with the Prompt Payment Code, the Fair Payment Code's operation will be funded from the Office of Small Business Commissioner's existing budget.

Andrew Griffith:

[18415]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many businesses he expects to (a) apply for and (b) be granted awards under the new Fair Payment Code award tiers.

Gareth Thomas:

The Government would like to see as many businesses applying to the Fair Payment Code as possible, particularly larger businesses. Tackling late payments is a priority for the Department and the Fair Payment Code is one of a number of measures we are taking. Applying to the Fair Payment Code is a clear sign that businesses are prioritising paying their suppliers promptly and on time. The Office of Small Business Commissioner administer the Code on behalf of the Department and will announce the recipients in due course.

Andrew Griffith:

[18416]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what budget his Department has allocated for the first year of the process of assessing applications for awards as part of the new Fair Payment Code.

Gareth Thomas:

The Fair Payment Code is administered by the Office of Small Business Commissioner on behalf of the Department of Business and Trade. The Office of the Small Business Commissioner is grant in aid funded by the Department and in 2023/24 received £1.148m in grant funding. As had previously occurred with the Prompt Payment Code, applications to the Fair Payment Code's will be assessed by the Office of Small Business Commissioner and funded from its existing budget.

■ Small Businesses: Exports

Chris Curtis:

[20526]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to increase export opportunities for SMEs.

Gareth Thomas:

This government is determined to get even more small and medium sized firms exporting.

Last month, we launched the Enhanced Trade Partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. This partnership pilots a focused export support scheme designed to offer unparalleled targeted support to accelerate business growth through selling their products and services overseas. We have launched Unlock Europe, a new export programme designed to help UK businesses build stronger relationships with European customers.

As part of our work on a new trade strategy and a small business strategy, we are looking at further proposals to help our businesses export more.

■ Small Businesses: UK Trade with EU**Dr Roz Savage:**[\[19614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the UK's departure from the EU single market on the (a) administrative and (b) other costs faced by UK small businesses trading with EU customers; and what steps he plans to take with Cabinet colleagues to support the competitiveness of those businesses.

Gareth Thomas:

The Department for Business and Trade continuously monitors the impact of leaving the EU on costs to businesses through our business surveys, ONS reports, and other intelligence sources, as well as through regular direct engagement with exporters - Minister Alexander and I recently hosted a roundtable with SMEs specifically about exporting to the EU. Indeed, a report published by the LSE just this week highlights the disproportionate detrimental impact that Brexit has had on small businesses, with goods exports to the EU dropping by an estimated 30% for the smallest firms.

This Government is addressing those challenges by resetting our relationship with the EU, as discussed between the Prime Minister and European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen in October. We are exploring ways to prevent unnecessary border checks and strengthening our export support service - we launched the 'Unlock Europe' programme earlier this month as part of the Export Academy, which offers practical guidance that will help UK businesses enhance their exporting potential to the EU.

■ Stellantis**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[19285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17621 on Stellantis, if he will publish the minutes of those meetings.

Sarah Jones:

Minutes of these ministerial meetings cannot be released for reasons of commercial sensitivity. The Secretary of State gave a detailed account of his engagement with Stellantis during his oral ministerial statement on 27 November.

■ Toys and Games: Safety**Freddie van Mierlo:**[\[20107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that Christmas toys sold through online retailers are safe.

Justin Madders:

Government is committed to ensuring that only safe products can be sold. Under the Toys (Safety) Regulations 2011, all toys placed on the market must meet essential safety requirements.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards runs the national Online Marketplaces Programme, to reduce the risk of non-compliant products sold online. Through monitoring marketplaces, including purchasing and testing products, we assess the prevalence of unsafe toys and take appropriate enforcement action.

While regulations are clear that toys must be safe, the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill will enable regulations to be updated to better reflect modern online supply chains.

■ Trade Agreements

Tom Hayes:

[\[5242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make it his policy to include (a) a youth mobility scheme and (b) measures to support the English Language Training sector in the UK in future trade deals with non-EU countries.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

It is not Government policy to make commitments on youth mobility as a routine part of any trade deal. The UK generally seeks provisions in trade agreements that focus on business mobility, these help to expand opportunities and enhance certainty for UK businesses seeking to export services. The UK English Language Training sector is considered and consulted where necessary to ensure that their interests are supported.

■ Trade Agreements: Colombia

Llinos Medi:

[\[20417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent assessment has he made of the potential impact of the UK-Colombia bilateral agreement for the promotion and protection of investments, published in June 2014, on (a) climate change and (b) human rights.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

I refer the Hon. Member for Ynys Môn to my response to Question 12968 on 12th November 2024.

■ Trade Agreements: USA

Liam Byrne:

[\[20141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to section 1.3 2. of his policy paper entitled The Atlantic Declaration, updated on 21 June 2023, what progress he has made on establishing an outbound investment mechanism.

Gareth Thomas:

The Department for Business and Trade is keeping the potential national security risk posed by outward direct investment in sensitive sectors under review, and continuing to engage with businesses and financial stakeholders on this issue. In May, the Cabinet Office issued public guidance on how the existing National Security and

Investment Act powers allow the Government to intervene in certain outward direct investment transactions.

■ **Trade: Fairtrade Initiative**

Dr Scott Arthur:

[R] [18003]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his trade strategy will support the aims of the Fairtrade movement.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK Government is committed to advancing free and fair trade around that world that is inclusive, sustainable and reduces poverty.

We remain committed to engaging civil society as we develop the new Trade Strategy.

■ **UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland**

Tonia Antoniazzi:

[20243]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the ongoing closure of Holyhead Port on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Sarah Jones:

Ferry travel between Dublin and Holyhead continues to be severely affected by closure due to damage inflicted by Storm Darragh on Holyhead until it reopens early next year. The direct effect is on crossings between the UK and the Republic of Ireland though alternative routes from Liverpool and Cairnryan to Belfast and Larne are available and capacity is being reinforced. There are onward effects on UK services, but these are manageable. Government is concerned about the impact on local businesses and communities and are in close contact with the Welsh Government, who lead, together with port and ferry operators.

■ **Urban Areas: Government Assistance**

Andrew Cooper:

[19530]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support high streets in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Gareth Thomas:

Revitalising our high streets is a priority for this government. We are taking active steps towards creating better conditions for high street businesses to thrive, including addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, reforming business returns, working with the banking industry to roll out 350 banking hubs, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network, reforming the apprenticeship levy, and business rates.

Our Small Business Strategy Command Paper, to be published in 2025, will set out this Government's intentions on supporting small businesses across key areas, including thriving high streets.

This will build on targeted high street support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that is already being delivered in Cheshire.

■ **Vodafone Group: Coronavirus**

Sir John Hayes:

[19239]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department awarded financial assistance to Vodafone during the 2020 lockdown.

Gareth Thomas:

The Government does not comment on whether individual businesses received financial assistance during the 2020 lockdown as that information is considered commercially sensitive.

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Cabinet Office: Disclosure of Information**

Tessa Munt:

[R] [20197]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish Departmental transparency returns for the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Ministers', Senior Officials' and Special Advisers' transparency returns for the period of April to June 2024 were published on 28th November. Data for the period of July to September will be published in due course.

Tessa Munt:

[R] [20198]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, from which Departments he received confirmation that all the data held in relation to those Departments' transparency returns for the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024 was submitted by the end of October 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Guidance on ministers', special advisers', and senior officials' transparency returns is published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) outlining the Cabinet Office's internal feedback process.

■ **Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[20227]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 14994 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission, if he will publish a summary of any discussions with President Xi on 18 November 2024 on the planning application for the Chinese Embassy not included in the gov.uk readout.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20229\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 14994 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission, if he will provide a readout of the Prime Minister's discussions with President Xi on the planning application for the Chinese Embassy.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

I refer the Hon Member to my answer of 4 December, Official Report, 14994. The official read-out is a summary of the issues discussed at their meeting.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20230\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether officials from 10 Downing Street had discussions with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on the call-in of the Chinese Embassy planning application prior to the decision being taken.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

I refer the Hon Member to my Hon Friends answer of 6 December, Official Report, 17009.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Senior Civil Servants**

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[19282\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many applications his Department received for the Second Permanent Secretary for European Union and International Economic Affairs role advertised in November 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Applications have closed for the Cabinet Office Second Permanent Secretary for European Union and International Economic Affairs role. As was practice under the previous administration we do not comment on competitions underway.

■ **Foreign Investment in UK: National Security**

Liam Byrne:

[\[20142\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the written statement of 18 April 2024 on Economic Security, HCWS415, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of targeted exemptions from the mandatory notification requirements of the National Security and Investment Act 2021.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The National Security and Investment (NSI) Act has an important role to play in ensuring businesses in the UK can thrive and access vital investment without compromising our national security. We are therefore considering the responses to the previous Government's Call for Evidence and reflecting on our own experiences of making decisions in the NSI system over the past six months.

■ National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority: Departmental Responsibilities

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18398\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 13821 on Infrastructure and Projects Authority: Departmental Responsibility, which Minister will be responsible for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority.

Georgia Gould:

The Government will confirm the responsible Minister for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority in due course.

■ Trade Agreements: EU Countries

Tom Hayes: [\[5241\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make it his policy to include (a) a youth mobility scheme and (b) measures to support the English Language Teaching sector in the UK in future trade deals with EU countries.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

I apologise to the Honourable Member for the delay in responding to his question of 10 September.

The Government set out clear priorities for the reset with the EU in the manifesto. There are no plans for a Youth Mobility Scheme.

The UK generally seeks provisions in trade agreements to expand opportunities and enhance certainty for UK businesses seeking to export services. The UK's English Language Training sector is considered and consulted where necessary to ensure that their interests are supported.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

■ Archbishops: Termination of Employment

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18669\]](#)

To ask the Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church of England has a formal process for the removal of an Archbishop.

Marsha De Cordova:

The duration of appointments of office holders in the Church of England is governed by statutory provisions. Under section 3 of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009, the term of office of a person who holds office under Common Tenure (which includes archbishops, bishops and most other clergy) is terminated: • on the death of the office holder • by resignation • on attaining the mandatory retirement age (subject to any extension) • where the office ceases to exist • where the office holder is removed from office under the Clergy Discipline

Measure 2003 • on the expiry of a fixed term appointment (where applicable) • under the capability procedures.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2009/1/contents>

■ Cemeteries: County Durham

Alan Strickland:

[17310]

To ask the Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, if the Church will take steps to improve the maintenance of Quarrington Hill Graveyard in County Durham.

Marsha De Cordova:

The management of a churchyard that is legally open for further burials is the responsibility of the local Parochial Church Council. However the situation at Quarrington Hill Churchyard is complicated by it being situated on land subject to ongoing subsidence due to centuries of mine-works beneath the surface.

The parish church of St Paul, which originally sat within the churchyard, was demolished in 1993 due to this subsidence. This makes the management and safety of the site complicated, and a great challenge for the small local charity funded exclusively by the personal giving of a dedicated but small congregation.

The Parochial Church Council sought the closure of the churchyard by an Order in Council. This would have allowed the management of the churchyard to pass to the Local Authority, which has more resources available for a challenge of this nature. The application was refused, pending a more detailed geophysical survey to determine the safety or otherwise of further burials. I understand however that the costs of such a survey are themselves beyond the means of the Parochial Church Council.

The churchyard is open to visitors, following work to make access safe, but the long-term management of the War Graves and other family memorials will require significant resourcing.

The Acting Bishop of Durham is due to contact the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor about the future management and maintenance of the Commonwealth War Graves and the churchyard and will be able to advise him further.

■ Marriage: Relatives

Mr Richard Holden:

[19830]

To ask the Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church plans to amend the Table of Kindred and Affinity to exclude first cousins from marriage.

Marsha De Cordova:

The 'Table of Kindred and Affinity' is part of the Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer can be changed by a Measure from the General Synod of the

Church of England, which would come to Parliament for approval in the usual manner. The Church of England has no plans currently to change the text.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ British Film Institute

John McDonnell: [\[19227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the British Film Institute on the position of Education/Film Programmer, Adult Community.

John McDonnell: [\[19228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the British Film Institute on a race equality impact assessment for the position of Education/Film Programmer, Adult Community.

John McDonnell: [\[19229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the British Film Institute on the potential impact on Black (a) communities and (b) audiences of the position of Education/Film Programmer, Adult Community.

John McDonnell: [\[19230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the British Film Institute on the potential adverse impacts on equality grounds of the position of Education/Film Programmer, Adult Community.

Chris Bryant:

No, ministers have not had any such discussions with the BFI. Staffing decisions within the BFI are operational matters for the organisation, which is responsible for ensuring its compliance with relevant equality legislation and its own equality, diversity and inclusion commitments. Likewise, matters relating to audience engagement and programming are the responsibility of the BFI.

John McDonnell: [\[19231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the British Film Institute on public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Chris Bryant:

No.

■ Cathedrals: Hereford and Lichfield**Mark Pritchard:** [\[20588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department is taking steps to provide support to (a) Hereford and (b) Lichfield Cathedral.

Chris Bryant:

Since August 2022, Lichfield Cathedral has received £161,242 through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, and Hereford Cathedral has received £27,639.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has also supported both of these Cathedrals. Lichfield Cathedral has received £1,707,762 since 1996. Hereford Cathedral has received £6,135,300 since 2003.

■ Film and Television: Buildings**Chris Bloore:** [\[20333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to incentivise the building of television and film studios in the (a) regions and (b) West Midlands.

Chris Bryant:

We are already incentivising film and TV production in the UK, with UK-wide funding programmes, infrastructure investment, competitive tax reliefs and direct support for independent British content.

The British Film Commission (BFC) is supporting the growth of the UK's seven geographic production hubs to ensure that the combination of infrastructure, stage space and crew in those locations is set up to attract and accommodate even more major inward investment. Further funding for the BFC for 2025/26 was confirmed at the Autumn Budget.

Beyond the seven established hubs, there are many more areas across the UK brimming with potential and ambition which the Government will continue to support. In the West Midlands, Birmingham is becoming a very successful cultural hub enriched by recent investments including the BBC and Netflix at Digbeth Loc Studios. At the Autumn Budget, £25 million was confirmed for the new Crown Works Studio in Sunderland via the North East Combined Mayoral Authority.

■ Football**Mr Louie French:** [\[20471\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with (a) the shadow football regulator and (b) supporters groups on fan engagement over kick-off time changes.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government fully appreciates the frustration and disappointment that fans might experience following kick off times being changed.

Fan consultation is a key part of the licensing regime within the Football Governance Bill and the relevant matters have been deliberately designed to capture the wide array of club matters that may impact fans.

Within such categories as “match-day and operational issues”, topics such as accessibility, ticket purchasing processes, and stewarding may all be relevant, depending on the club. The requirements mean that clubs and their supporters could choose to discuss kick off times in these meetings, if they choose to.

However, kick-off times are not included on the face of the Football Governance Bill as, in the majority of cases, these are not within the control of the club. Ultimately, the scheduling of fixtures is a matter for the relevant league and the Football Association (the FA), in conjunction with broadcasters, local authorities, and the police.

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

James MacCleary:

[\[20386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the impact of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme on the preservation of historic churches; and whether her Department plans to renew the scheme beyond March 2025.

Chris Bryant:

The Department monitors the implementation and impact of the grant scheme through the regular reporting of the grant administrator. Since 2010, the grant scheme has returned over £350 million to listed places of worship including churches.

Departmental settlements have been set following the Budget announcement on October 30. Individual programmes will now be assessed during the departmental Business Planning process.

■ Music Venues: Liverpool

Ian Byrne:

[\[20044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help support grassroots live music venues in Liverpool.

Chris Bryant:

Following the Autumn Budget, we are continuing to support Arts Council England's (ACE's) successful Supporting Grassroots Music Fund which provides grants to grassroots music venues, recording studios, promoters and festivals across England. ACE has provided funding to grassroots music venues in Liverpool, such as the multi-purpose venue District for the District Live Music Programme, to help support 6 months of accessible live music performances. There are also a number of ACE's National Portfolio Organisations that support grassroots music in Liverpool, such as Liverpool Sound City, an annual music festival and industry conference, and Future Yard, a community music venue which provides training and artist development services alongside live music space.

■ Olympic Games: Finance**Mr Louie French:** [\[20470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with UK Sport on future funding for Olympic and Paralympic sport.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government will continue to support the successes of Team GB and ParalympicsGB. The Chancellor has confirmed that a multi-year investment will mean a total of £344 million is invested in Olympic and Paralympic success over the next cycle. This will support them through to the 2028 Olympic Games and provide excellent foundations for the 2032 Games and beyond.

■ Voluntary Work: Prizes**Graham Stuart:** [\[20163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has for the Points of Light awards.

Stephanie Peacock:

Volunteers serve at the heart of our communities nationwide, dedicating their time to create positive change and enhance the lives of those around them. The Government is committed to supporting volunteering, which is critical to a vibrant, connected and resilient civil society. We are currently considering how the hugely valuable contributions of volunteers can be best recognised.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Private Education****James Cartlidge:** [\[20236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December to Question 19373 on Armed Forces: Private Education, how much of the (a) £95 million and (b) £104.4 million will be used to fund the uprating of CEA in (i) 2024-25, (ii) 2025-26, (iii) 2026-2027 and (iv) 2028-29.

Al Carns:

The estimated cost of Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) for Financial Year (FY) 2024-25 is £95 million. This includes a £4 million increase for spring term 2025 as a result of the re-rating exercise done for December 2024, a response to the addition of VAT on independent schools. CEA with the current rates would be estimated to cost £104.4 million for a full year; however, estimating actual spend for FY 2025-26 is not possible as rates will be reviewed before the next academic year starting September 2025.

■ Armed Forces: Recruitment

Mr Mark Francois: [\[20152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his timeline is for full implementation of the Armed Forces Recruitment Partnership across the Armed Forces; and what the key milestones are.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[20153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to complete the evaluation phase of the Armed Forces Recruitment Partnership; and whether he plans to publish the findings.

Luke Pollard:

Due diligence reviews have been conducted to determine the winning bidder of the Armed Forces Recruiting Programme (AFRP) contract. With the contract's approval process ongoing, it would not be appropriate to publish the outcome of the evaluation. Independent programme evaluations, to assess delivery success against agreed benefits, will continue throughout the life of the Armed Forces Recruiting Service.

The approvals process is due to be completed in early 2025. Following this, the contract will be awarded and the successful bidder announced. This is expected in February 2025.

The implementation of the AFRP has been phased to reduce the risks to service delivery.

■ Army: Vehicles

James Cartlidge: [\[20667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December to Question 18156 on Army: Vehicles, whether he plans to increase the numbers of Heavy Equipment Transporters procured as new track vehicles entering use in the Army.

Maria Eagle:

There is no current plan to increase the number of Heavy Equipment Transporters (HET) procured as new track vehicles enter use in the Army. The number of HET provided under the existing service contract is deemed sufficient to meet the Army's operational and training requirements.

■ Defence Equipment: Expenditure

Helen Maguire: [\[20117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department spent on (a) weapons, (b) ammunition and (c) armoured fighting vehicles in (i) 2022/2023 and (ii) 2023/24; and what estimate he has made of such spending in 2024/25.

Maria Eagle:

This information is not held centrally and therefore it has not been possible to provide the answer within the allotted time frame. I will write to the hon. Member with an update in due course and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

■ Defence: Expenditure**Liam Byrne:**[\[20146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of defence spending on (a) economic growth and (b) regional growth in each of the next five years.

Maria Eagle:

The Government is bringing forward a Defence Industrial Strategy that aligns our security and economic priorities. The strategic aim of the Defence Industrial Strategy is to make sure the imperatives of national security and a high-growth economy are addressed.

Defence has a key role to play in delivering the Government's Growth Mission, by setting the conditions necessary for economic growth and by growing a better, more integrated, more innovative, and more resilient defence sector. An important part of this work is understanding and developing the impact defence spending has on the nations and regions of the UK.

■ Defence: Manufacturing Industries**Suella Braverman:**[\[20659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent high-skilled jobs from moving to Europe in the context of the potential closure of the Airbus Portsmouth site.

Maria Eagle:

His Majesty's Government (HMG) is working to ensure that the UK remains a leading hub for the global space sector and as a destination for the talent which is required to continue to develop the industry. HMG is engaging with Airbus to understand its consolidation plans, and any decisions relating to the size and structure of Airbus' workforce are a matter for the company.

■ Defence: Procurement**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[19644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the Integrated Procurement Model will be fully introduced across all defence procurement processes.

Maria Eagle:

Good progress has been made on design and implementation of the key features of a reformed model, which are part of the wider defence reforms announced by the Defence Secretary in October. Implementation will continue into 2025.

Through these changes we will deliver defence capabilities at greater pace, taking a One Defence approach to our requirements to secure the best possible value for money.

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[19646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to ensure that the Integrated Procurement Model improves the delivery timelines of major defence projects.

Maria Eagle:

Good progress has been made on design and implementation of the key features of a reformed model, which are part of the wider defence reforms announced by the Defence Secretary in October.

We will improve delivery timelines for our major programmes through an integrated approach to ensure strategic alignment around outcomes, earlier expert advice including closer working with industry, and greater use of Spiral acquisition approaches to exploit technology and innovate.

Improving delivery timelines will be an important part of the new National Armaments Director role being established. Its aim is to ensure the Armed Forces are properly equipped to defend Britain, to build up the British defence industry, and to cut waste.

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[19647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how the Integrated Procurement Model ensures equitable access for small and medium-sized enterprises in the defence supply chain.

Maria Eagle:

Good progress has been made on design and implementation of the key features of a reformed model, which are part of the wider defence reforms announced by the Defence Secretary in October.

The Ministry of Defence has a long-standing commitment to improve its engagement with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in order to broaden and strengthen its supply base. The recently published Defence Industrial Strategy Statement of Intent recognises our intention to foster a more diverse community of suppliers, and will prompt a refresh of our SME Action Plan.

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[19648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what measures are in place to mitigate cost overruns in projects managed under the Integrated Procurement Model.

Maria Eagle:

Good progress has been made on design and implementation of the key features of a reformed model, which are part of the wider defence reforms announced by the Defence Secretary in October.

To set programmes up for success from the outset, the Department is taking steps to provide expert advice on cost estimating much earlier in the project lifecycle.

This will help inform strategic balance of investment decisions, reduce optimism bias to improve future financial stability, and ultimately improve delivery and drive pace.

Ian Roome: [\[19818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department is taking steps to encourage the use of small and medium-sized businesses in its defence procurement process; and what steps he is taking to improve the resilience of the defence supply chain.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has a long-standing commitment to improve its engagement with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in order to broaden and strengthen its supply-base. The recently published Defence Industrial Strategy Statement of Intent recognises our intention to foster a more diverse community of suppliers and will prompt a refresh of our SME Action Plan. Alongside this, the Department is undertaking other initiatives to strengthen its supply-chain resilience, including securing access to critical materials, components and technologies, and a first-of-its-kind wargame to explore how industry and the MOD could sustain personnel on the frontline when faced with constant supply chain disruption.

Liam Byrne: [\[20145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference paragraph 4.51 of the Autumn Budget 2024, what his Department's priorities are for the planned £20 billion spending with UK industry in 2025-26.

Maria Eagle:

Funding for the Ministry of Defence for financial year 2025-26 has not yet been allocated to specific programmes or activities. The Department is still in the process of setting budgets internally.

■ Global Combat Air Programme

James Cartlidge: [\[19733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7495 on Global Combat Air Programme, what comparative estimate he has made of the future delivery timeline of the Tempest platform as a (a) uncrewed and (b) piloted platform.

James Cartlidge: [\[19734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7495 on Global Combat Air Programme, what comparative estimate he has made of the cost of the Tempest platform as a (a) uncrewed and (b) piloted platform.

James Cartlidge: [\[19735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7495 on Global Combat Air Programme, what comparative estimate he has

made of the (a) cost and (b) time taken for (i) safety, (ii) training and (iii) certification from delivering the Tempest platform as (A) uncrewed and (B) piloted.

James Cartlidge:

[\[19736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7495 on Global Combat Air Programme, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in (a) Italy and (b) Japan on the potential merits of the Tempest platform being delivered uncrewed.

Maria Eagle:

AI and autonomous technologies are developing rapidly and the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) core platform is being designed to incorporate them as they mature. We assess that pilots will still have a crucial role to play when GCAP comes into service and that their role, and the overall capability of the aircraft, will be augmented substantially by AI and autonomous technologies. For example, extensive use will be made of these technologies to task sensors, triage data, and analyse combat situations more quickly. How and when we incorporate these cutting-edge technologies will be driven by their maturity and ongoing assessments as to what best enables us to fight and win most effectively in highly contested environments.

The cost and time to ensure safety, training, and certification of these technologies is being refined through modelling and operational analysis. As the focus is on bringing into service a capability that is initially both piloted and involves substantial AI/autonomous technology, distinct estimates for a crewed versus an uncrewed capability have not been made.

The crewed aircraft being developed by the Global Combat Air Programme will operate in a future combat air system that includes uncrewed capabilities. AI and autonomous technology will also be central to the development of these collaborative uncrewed capabilities. Analysis and assessment of procurement options for collaborative uncrewed capabilities to complement Typhoon, F35 and GCAP aircraft is underway.

We are in regular discussions with our Italian and Japanese partners on these issues, as together we seek to ensure we are ready to exploit technological opportunities for our joint military and industrial advantage.

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[20148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to launch the Global Combat Air Programme development phase of the next generation fighter aircraft.

Maria Eagle:

Work is ongoing with our GCAP Partners Japan and Italy to establish the core platform concept and set up the structures needed, ready to launch the Development Phase in 2025.

■ Guided Weapons

James Cartlidge: [19732]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress he has made on providing a clear demand signal to the UK's sovereign complex weapons industrial base.

Maria Eagle:

The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) has prioritised long term strategic relationships with our UK sovereign complex weapons industrial base. The MOD has recently signed the PMA2 with MBDA, through which weapon systems design, development, production, and support will be conducted. It presents a significant opportunity to counter current and future threats, providing military capability choice to the UK and Europe. Renewing this partnership for a further 10 years means we can deliver battle-winning equipment to our Armed Forces, while securing thousands of UK jobs and delivering significant savings to the taxpayer. It is an excellent example of the value and importance of long-term strategic collaboration with our industry partners.

The MOD is exploring further opportunities for strategic supplier partnerships across the UK Complex Weapons industrial base.

The MOD are awaiting the outcome to the Str prior to committing to future demands at this point.

■ Ministry of Defence: Capita

Mr Mark Francois: [20154]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 17774 on Ministry of Defence: Capita, whether (a) penalties under and (b) adjustments to Capita's contract have been applied as a result of the (i) March and (ii) September 2024 performance reviews.

Mr Mark Francois: [20155]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 17774 on Ministry of Defence: Capita, whether the performance reviews of Capita in (a) March and (b) September 2024 made recommendations.

Luke Pollard:

I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 17 December 2024, to Questions 19639, 19640, 19641, 19642 and 19643.

Attachments:

1. [Armed Forces: Recruitment](#) [UIN 19639.docx]

■ Ministry of Defence: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry: [19653]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) his core Department and (b) executive agencies of his Department at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Maria Eagle:

The number of cards held across the Ministry of Defence and DSTL (executive agency) at the end of calendar years 2022 and 2023 were as follows:

END OF CALENDAR YEAR	CORE DEPARTMENT	EXECUTIVE AGENCIES
2022	8,853	281
2023	8,542	302

■ Ministry of Defence: Employers' Contributions**James Cartlidge:**[\[20237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 18982 on Ministry of Defence: Employers' Contributions, how much HM Treasury will contribute towards the increased cost of National Insurance contributions for the Department in the next financial year.

Al Carns:

As set out in the Autumn Budget, the Government has set aside funding to support the public sector with employer National Insurance Contributions. Details of the funding set aside for 2025-26, including its allocation, will be published in the usual way.

■ Ministry of Defence: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 9612 on Ministry of Defence: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Maria Eagle:

Between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024, the total cost of refurbishment works in Ministers' Private Offices was c£27,000. The works comprised wallpapering and replacement carpets.

■ National Armaments Director**James Cartlidge:**[\[20674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the new National Armaments Director will be required to have had significant experience in the defence industry.

Maria Eagle:

Details of the required and desired experience for the new National Armaments Director role will be detailed in the job description, which will be published shortly.

■ Nuclear Weapons

James Cartlidge: [\[20675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether it is his policy to deliver the commitments of the Defence Nuclear Enterprise Command Paper published on 25 March 2024.

Maria Eagle:

Nuclear deterrence is critically important to our national security and this Government maintains an unwavering commitment to our nuclear deterrent, illustrated by the nuclear triple lock. This includes the ongoing build of the four Dreadnought Class submarines at Barrow-in-Furness, maintaining our continuous at sea deterrent, and the delivery of all future upgrades needed for the UK's submarines to patrol the waters and keep our country safe.

■ Poland: Guided Weapons

James Cartlidge: [\[19731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking with his Polish counterpart to progress the Future Common Missile programme.

Maria Eagle:

As a close ally and partner, we continue to work closely with Poland to progress our relationship in Integrated Air and Missile Defence.

■ Poland: NATO

James Cartlidge: [\[19730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Typhoons will deploy to Poland in the spring as part of NATO Enhanced Air Policing.

Luke Pollard:

The UK continues to fully support its commitment to NATO's rotational enhanced air policing model. The UK will be deploying six x Typhoon to Poland for a 4-month block in 2025 alongside a partner Swedish force of Gripen to provide a quick reaction force to defend NATO airspace in accordance with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's regional plans.

■ Shipbuilding: Appledore Shipyard and Belfast

James Cartlidge: [\[20668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he is taking steps to help sustain shipbuilding jobs at (a) Belfast and (b) Appledore shipyards.

Maria Eagle:

This Government recognises the vital role shipbuilding and its skilled workforce plays, not only in our national security but also in the economic prosperity and growth of the United Kingdom.

A commercial deal has been reached that will see Navantia UK purchase Harland and Wolff. We welcome the commercial deal by Navantia UK that secures the future of Harland and Wolff, protecting around 1,000 jobs at all four shipyards across the UK, including Belfast and Appledore.

■ Sky Sabre

James Cartlidge:

[\[19729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has for the redeployment of the Sky Sabre GBAD capability based in Rzeszow following the conclusion of Op STIFFTAIL.

Luke Pollard:

Sky Sabre, the UK's Medium range air defence capability that was deployed under Op STIFFTAIL, is now returning to the UK to undergo a period of reconstitution. There are a number of options for redeployment under consideration but there has been no decision at this time. A combination of capabilities and effects remain in place to ensure that all UK troops deployed overseas remain protected from an air defence perspective and the UK continues to meet its NATO commitments. The UK remains committed to the security of Poland and NATO's Eastern Flank through and continues to work closely with Poland to identify and deliver bilateral and multilateral operations and exercises.

■ Torpedoes: Procurement

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[20149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the total cost is of the Spearfish heavy weight torpedo programme.

Maria Eagle:

The total funds allocated for the Spearfish torpedo programme are approximately £1154 million which incorporates the cost of the through life management of the programme.

■ Ukraine: Military Aid

James Cartlidge:

[\[19737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many artillery shells were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since the beginning of the conflict, we have delivered over 490,000 rounds of artillery ammunition to Ukraine. In February this year, we announced a £245 million munitions package to procure and invigorate supply chains to produce urgently needed ammunition for Ukraine.

This Government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge: **[19738]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many anti-tank weapons were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since 2022, we have provided more than 15,000 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine.

This Government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge: **[19739]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many air defence systems were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since February 2022, the UK has provided over 1,800 air defence missiles of various types to Ukraine, including High Velocity Missile (HVM) Starstreak, Martlet Lightweight Multi-Role Missile (LMM), Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missiles (ASRAAM) and Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM). The UK has also provided hundreds of air defence systems such as Stormer, as well as electronic warfare systems.

In addition, the UK led International Fund for Ukraine, has provided over 600 Air Defence systems including radars, electronic warfare systems and counter-uncrewed aerial systems.

This government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge: **[19740]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) offensive drones and (b) drones primarily for logistical use were procured for Ukraine (i) in 2022, (ii) in 2023, (iii) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (iv) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since February 2022, the UK has provided over 4,000 drones to Ukraine covering a broad range of capabilities including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, logistical and strike drones for both the land and maritime domain. Most of these drones are offensive drones; either directly providing lethal effect or enabling lethal effect. Of these drones, a minority were primarily for logistical use.

In addition, the UK led International Fund for Ukraine, has provided over 400 drones to Ukraine covering a broad range of capabilities. Most of these drones are offensive drones; either directly providing lethal effect or enabling lethal effect. Of these drones, a minority were primarily for logistical use.

This government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge:

[19741]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many small arms munitions were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5th July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since 2022, we have provided more than 10 million small arms munitions to Ukraine.

This government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge:

[19742]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many helmets were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Since 2022, we have delivered over 82,000 helmets to Ukraine. We have also provided over 50,000 helmets via Operation Interflex.

This government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

James Cartlidge:

[19743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many long range missiles were procured for Ukraine (a) in 2022, (b) in 2023, (c) from 1 January 2024 to 5 July 2024 and (d) since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

In May 2023, the UK provided Ukraine with long range Storm Shadow cruise missiles so that Ukraine can better defend its sovereign territory and protect itself from Russia's deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Further details on the number of Storm Shadow cruise missiles provided, or associated delivery schedules, cannot be shared for reasons of operational security.

This Government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as it is needed.

■ Warships: Crew**James Cartlidge:** [\[20676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether all crew assigned to (a) HMS Albion and (b) HMS Bulwark have been reassigned to other platforms.

Maria Eagle:

All of the remaining crew from HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark have been reassigned: either to other platforms, to training courses, or into other positions supporting the Royal Navy's highest priority outputs.

A small number of Royal Navy personnel have been retained to manage onboard systems and safety until final disposal.

EDUCATION**■ Adult Education: Cornwall****Ben Maguire:** [\[18083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support adult education in Cornwall.

Janet Daby:

The department is investing in education and skills training for adults through the Adult Skills Fund (ASF), which is worth £1.34 billion this academic year. The ASF fully or co-funds education and skills training for eligible adults aged 19 and above, from pre-entry to level 3, to help them gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

Currently, approximately 60% of the ASF is devolved to nine Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Mayor of London, acting where appropriate through the Greater London Authority. These authorities are responsible for the provision of ASF-funded adult education for their residents and allocation of the ASF to learning providers. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is responsible for the remaining ASF in non-devolved areas.

Cornwall is currently a non-devolved area, meaning the ESFA grant funds the providers who decide the provision offered. The department believes that local areas should have more control over adult education in their areas. As such, the government has agreed a devolution deal with Cornwall which includes the devolution of the ASF from the 2025/26 academic year. This will provide the area with the ability to commission adult education to Cornwall residents.

Ben Maguire: [\[18084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of additional Government-funded Adult Education Centres across Cornwall.

Janet Daby:

Adult education, for learners aged 19 years and above, is funded through the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and delivered through further education colleges, local authority adult education services, training providers and Institutes of Adult Learning. Providers have the freedom and flexibility to determine how they use their ASF allocations to meet the needs of their communities.

Adult education is offered in college buildings, adult education centres, and accessible informal venues, such as libraries and community centres to meet local needs. It is for local providers to decide if a specific adult education centre is required for their community.

The government believes that local areas are best able to meet local needs, which is why it is committed to devolving the ASF to parts of the country that want a devolution deal. Cornwall is due to receive a devolution deal for the 2025/26 academic year and will be able to use their share of the ASF to best meet their needs, including on reviewing how their funding is best distributed locally to adult education providers.

■ Apprentices: Finance**Ian Roome:**[\[18739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of changes to levels of funding for Level-7 apprenticeships on access to graduate-level education in rural areas.

Janet Daby:

The government is committed to spreading opportunities and economic growth supported by a strong skills system.

This government has an extremely challenging fiscal inheritance. There are tough choices that need to be taken on how funding should be prioritised in order to generate opportunities for young people that enable them to make a start in good, fulfilling careers, and the department will therefore be asking more employers to step forward and fund a significant number of level 7 apprenticeships outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer.

The department will take advice from Skills England, who are currently engaging with employers on this matter, and expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships in the new year.

The department recognises that for some employers level 7 apprenticeships form an important part of their workforce and career development offers. Employers will still be able to offer and invest in these apprenticeships where they feel they provide a good return on their investment.

■ Carers: Finance

Charlotte Cane:

[19527]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will provide additional funding to help support kinship carers.

Janet Daby:

The government recognises the important role that kinship carers play in caring for some of the most vulnerable children.

On 27 October 2024, the government announced a £40 million package to trial a new Kinship Allowance in up to ten local authorities to test whether paying an allowance to cover the additional costs of supporting the child can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends. The announcement is accessible here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-protects-education-priorities-in-face-of-inherited-22-billion-blackhole>. The department will share further details on the process for selecting local authorities in due course.

This is the single biggest investment made by government in kinship care to date. This investment could transform the lives of vulnerable children who can no longer live at home.

The programme will begin in 2025 and decisions about future national rollout will be informed by the findings of the evaluation. The department will share further detail on the timetable and delivery of the programme in due course.

■ Children: Care Homes

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[19957]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many children are in a residential children's home over 20 miles from their family home.

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[19958]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of children being placed in residential children's homes more than 20 miles away from their family homes on their care.

Janet Daby:

The number of children looked after who were placed in secure homes and children's homes over 20 miles from their family home on 31 March 2024 was 4,220.

This is published in Table A4 of the 'Children looked after including adoptions' statistical release, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/03be7f62-cb0e-4000-2555-08dd1b6649db>.

The needs of the child are paramount when deciding the right care placement. Though the department wants to reduce out of area placements, they will always be part of the care landscape, as sometimes circumstances make it the right decision for

a child to be placed elsewhere, for example when they are at risk from domestic abuse or sexual exploitation, trafficking or gang violence.

The department knows that children placed away from home can experience disruption to their lives and they can make it harder to maintain important relationships, such as with their birth family, education setting or wider community. This is why moving a child away is not a decision to be taken lightly and there are legislative safeguards around this. Regulations are clear that the decision to place a child outside of the local authority should have the child's interest at heart and the child, family and independent reviewing officer's views should be considered. It should be signed off by the director of children's services, and all relevant parties should be notified, including the receiving local authority and safeguarding partners.

This government's proposed reforms will mean less need for distance placements. Proposals on planning permissions and process will enable providers to more easily set up homes where they are most needed. Regional care cooperatives will improve local authorities' ability to shape the local market, and the kinship local offer requirement will encourage more kinship arrangements. We are also investing £86 million in capital funding to create up to 200 additional children's homes beds which will help ensure more of the right provision in the right places.

■ Children: Care Homes and Foster Care

James Naish:

[19798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the fees charged by (a) not-for-profit children's home providers and (b) independent fostering agencies; and whether the proposed financial transparency measures set out in the Department's policy paper entitled Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive, published on 18 November 2024, will apply to charitable organisations operating in the children's social care sector.

Janet Daby:

Every child in care should have a safe, loving home which is also value for money for the taxpayer.

However, some local authorities are on the brink of bankruptcy, in part due to the rising costs of spending on children in care which has increased significantly from £3.1 billion in 2009/10 to £8.1 billion in 2023/24. This is all while some providers are making excessive profits despite sometimes providing subpar care for our most vulnerable children.

In their 2022 report, the Competition and Markets Authority examined prices and profits across the children's social care market and estimated operating profit margins for the 15 largest providers between 2016 and 2020 were 22.6% for children's homes, 19.4% for independent fostering agencies and 35.5% for supported accommodation.

The department is clear that profiteering from vulnerable children in care is absolutely unacceptable and this is why the department is taking forward a package of

measures to rebalance the children's social care placement market and stamp out profiteering.

The financial oversight measures set out in 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' will increase financial and corporate transparency among the most difficult to replace providers and their corporate owners.

The scheme will apply to private, voluntary and charity providers of children's homes and independent fostering agencies operating in England.

■ Curriculum and Assessment Review

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[19871]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Curriculum and Assessment Review is looking at disadvantages faced by boys at school.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government has a driving mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child and young person, including boys, at every stage. The independent Curriculum and Assessment Review will consider barriers and ceilings to attainment throughout children's education and make recommendations on how they can be removed.

The review will ensure that the curriculum appropriately balances ambition, excellence, relevance, flexibility and inclusivity for all children and young people, to deliver a cutting-edge curriculum which enables every child to achieve and thrive.

The review's terms of reference can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>.

■ Department for Education: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry:

[18916]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Janet Daby:

The department, including its Arm's Length Bodies and Executive Agencies, spent the following amounts via an Electronic Procurement Card Solution (ePCS), previously known as Government Procurement Card (GPC):

(a) Spending above £500

The department publishes its ePCS expenditure over £500 data on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dfe-government-procurement-card-gpc-over-500> . The amounts published are consistent with the transparency policy and guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/payment-cards-pan-government-policy> .

For the calendar years, the total value of the sum of individual ePCS transactions above £500 (and net of individual refund transactions above £500) was (i) £4,665,676.98 in 2022 and (ii) £8,949,303.97 in 2023.

There are differences between the terms of this question and the Pan Government Policy. For example, in the treatment of individual transactions made on the same day, refunds and the time periods considered

(b) Spending below £500

For the calendar years, the total value of the sum of individual ePCS transactions below £500 (and net of individual refund transactions below £500) was (i) £416,010.02 in 2022 and (ii) £630,834.53 in 2023.

■ **Department for Education: Staff**

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[18051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many employee settlement agreements there were in her Department in each year since 2020; and what the total value of such agreements is.

Janet Daby:

The table below shows the number of employee settlement agreements since 2020.

	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS	TOTAL VALUE (£)
2020/21	0	0
2021/22	0	0
2022/23	<5	<£10,000
2023/24	<5	£25,001 - £50,000
2024/25*	<5	£10,000 - £25,000

*Until 30 November 2024

For 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 details where numbers are five or fewer are being withheld under section 40(2) of the Act that relates to Personal Information, as releasing the numbers may potentially lead to the identification of individual(s).

■ **Education and Unemployment: Liverpool Walton**

Dan Carden: [\[18383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of young people out of (a) work, (b) education and (c) training in Liverpool Walton constituency.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes national statistics on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) for England from the labour force survey for young people aged 16 to 24. However, these are only published at national and regional level due to limitations with sample sizes for lower-level geographies. Therefore, NEET rates for young people aged 16 to 24 cannot be provided for the area requested. The available statistics can be found at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief>.

Local authorities are required to encourage, enable or assist young people's participation in education or training and return management information for young people aged 16 and 17. This data shows that of the 10,372 young people aged 16 and 17-years-old who were known to Liverpool local authority around the end of 2022 (average of December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023), 885 were NEET or their activity was not known (530 known to be NEET and 355 young people whom the local authority could not confirm their activity). This data is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>. These are not national statistics but published as transparency data so some caution should be taken if using these figures. Data is not available for Liverpool, Walton constituency.

In addition, 16 to 18 destination measures are published. These official statistics show the percentage of pupils not continuing to a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination in the year after completing 16 to 18 study, that is 6 months of continual activity. This can be used as a proxy for NEET at age 18. Data for Liverpool Walton is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/55eab43f-7467-408e-90c8-08dd184e91f8>. This shows that out of 357 pupils completing 16 to 18 study in the 2021/22 academic year in Liverpool Walton, 39 pupils were not recorded as having a sustained destination in the 2022/23, and 23 pupils did not have their activity captured.

■ Educational Institutions: Staff**Fabian Hamilton:****[19632]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve staff wellbeing and retention in the education sector.

Catherine McKinnell:

Supporting our expert education workforce is critical to this government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for children and young people at every stage.

Improving the wellbeing of staff in the education sector, including teachers, is key to this. The department is working in partnership with the sector, and mental health experts, to make commitments to improve staff mental health and wellbeing and boost retention.

These commitments include the creation of the education staff wellbeing charter which sets out shared commitments to protect and promote the wellbeing of staff in schools and colleges. The charter can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>.

The charter can be used to inform a whole school or college approach to wellbeing or to develop a staff wellbeing strategy. So far, over 3,900 schools and colleges have signed up to it. In January 2024, the department published a progress report on its commitments in the charter, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-staff-wellbeing-and-teacher-retention>.

The department is funding mental health and wellbeing support for school and college leaders, which includes professional supervision and counselling for those who need it. More than 2,000 leaders have benefitted from the support so far. Support continues to be available and can be accessed by visiting the Education Support website, which can be found at: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>.

The department has made available a range of resources to help schools address teacher workload issues, prioritise staff wellbeing and support schools to introduce flexible working practices. For example, the department's improve workload and wellbeing for school staff service, which was developed alongside school leaders, includes a workload reduction toolkit to support schools to identify opportunities to cut excessive workload. More information about this service can be found here:

<https://improve-workload-and-wellbeing-for-school-staff.education.gov.uk/>.

The department also recently clarified that planning, preparation and assessment time can be done from home. The department has also removed the requirement for performance related pay and bureaucracy that went with it and has abolished one-word Ofsted judgements to deliver a system which provides better information for parents and is proportionate for staff.

Fair pay is key to ensuring teaching is an attractive and respected profession, which is why this government has accepted the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools from September 2024. This will be fully funded at a national level.

School support staff play a vital role in all our schools. They are crucial to ensuring we give children the best possible life chances and the department wants to ensure they are paid fairly for the work they do. This is why the department set out its plans to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) through the Employment Rights Bill, which was introduced on 10 October. Establishing the SSSNB will help ensure that schools can recruit and retain the staff needed to deliver high-quality, inclusive education.

Additionally, to boost recruitment and retention of teachers, the department has agreed to double the targeted retention incentive from 2024/25, which will give eligible early career teachers in key science, technology, engineering and

mathematics (STEM) and technical shortage subjects, working in disadvantaged schools and in all colleges, up to £6,000 after tax annually, on top of their normal pay.

■ Educational Psychology: Labour Turnover

Helen Maguire:

[\[20119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase levels of retention of educational psychologists beyond the minimum period they are required to remain in their local authority after their training is completed.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life, breaking down the barriers to opportunity.

Educational psychologists play a crucial role in the support available to children and young people, including those with SEND. Local authorities, as the employers of educational psychology services, are responsible for ensuring that their services are adequately staffed.

However, the department is taking measures to support local authorities by investing in building the pipeline. We are investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists from 2024. This is in addition to the £10 million currently being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists who began their training in September 2023.

To support retention, following graduation, trainees who have had their training funded by the department are required to remain in local authority employment for a minimum period. For trainees beginning their course in September 2024, this requirement has increased to three years.

■ Free School Meals: Finance

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[18085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to increase funding for (a) universal infant free school meals and (b) benefitted free school meals.

Stephen Morgan:

An uplift to the per-meal rate for universal infant free school meals and further education free meals was announced on 4 December 2024. The uplifted meal rate will be increased from £2.53 to £2.58 for 2024 to 2025, backdated to the start of the academic year.

To support the provision of benefits-related free school meals (FSM), the government provides funding at £490 per eligible FSM pupil per year as a factor value within the national funding formula. This value will be increasing to £495 per eligible FSM pupil in 2025/26.

■ Further Education and Universities: Finance

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[19813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure the financial resilience of the (a) university and (b) colleges sectors.

Janet Daby:

The department recognises that the financial position of the higher education (HE) sector is under pressure and this government has acted quickly to address this.

The department accepted, in full, the recommendations of the independent review of the Office for Students (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. On 2 December, the OfS announced temporary changes to its operations to allow greater focus on financial sustainability. The OfS will work more closely with providers under significant financial pressure in order to protect the interests of students. The department continues to work closely with the OfS to monitor any risks and 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 (3.1%). The department 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 also increase by 3.1%. 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.

The department also recognises the financial position of the further education (FE) sector is very important. As announced in the Autumn Budget 2024, the government is providing an additional £300 million for FE to ensure young people are developing the skills they need to succeed. We will set out in due course how that is distributed.

■ Further Education: Bus Services

Ben Maguire:

[\[18842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing ring-fenced funding to post-16 colleges to fund bus transport for students.

Janet Daby:

The department recognises that the cost and availability of public transport can be an issue for some 16 to 19-year-olds when travelling to their college or sixth form.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to put in place transport arrangements to help young people aged 16 to 19 to access education or training, including those aged 19 to 24 with special educational needs, through appropriately prioritising their spending.

Many local authorities do offer some form of subsidised transport, for example, in North Cornwall, Cornwall Council offer discounted fares to all young people, and free transport for those with education, health and care plans to access relevant learning where eligible.

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund can be used for transport costs to support young people to access education and training. Schools and colleges are responsible for deciding how to distribute their bursary allocations to students, and for establishing what criteria to use.

To ensure that the distribution of this funding around the regions matches the needs of young people, we use up-to-date disadvantage data and focus more on the costs of transport, to ensure institutions get more Bursary Fund if their students are from more disadvantaged areas and/or travel a long way to attend. Institutions decide which young people receive bursaries and determine the level of financial support they receive. They develop their own eligibility criteria for access to the discretionary bursary fund and must publish information on this for students.

More generally, 16 to 19 funding allocations which go to a range of providers including colleges, incorporate funding to support disadvantaged students. This funding does not have specified delivery conditions and providers are free to choose the best ways to use this additional funding to attract, retain and support disadvantaged students, including offering travel support.

■ Further Education: Pay

Mr James Frith: [\[18379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including further education colleges under the remit of the School Teacher Review Body from 2025-26.

Mr James Frith: [\[18380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including further education providers under the remit of the School Teacher Review Body in her Department's contribution to the Spending Review.

Janet Daby:

Further education (FE) colleges, rather than government, are responsible for setting and negotiating pay within colleges. Colleges are not bound by the national pay and conditions framework for school teachers, but are free to implement their own pay arrangements in line with their own local circumstances.

In making their recommendations for 2025/26, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) has been asked to consider the impact of their recommendations for school teachers on the FE teaching workforce in England. The published evidence provides information and context for STRB to consider as part of this process.

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 recognises the vital role that FE teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills they need to succeed in their education. We will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

FE institutions remain solely responsible for the pay, contractual conditions and terms of service for their workforce, and for managing their own industrial relations.

■ Home Education: Registration

Adam Jogee:

[\[19810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a home education register.

Stephen Morgan:

The government is committed to the introduction of statutory children not in school registers, maintained by each local authority in England. These registers will include those children who are being educated at home, and parents will have a duty to provide information about their children and where and how they are receiving their education. These measures are part of the recently announced Children's Wellbeing and School Bill, which was introduced in Parliament on Tuesday 17 December. As part of that Bill, we are also taking steps to require parents of some of our most vulnerable children to obtain local authority consent before they can move to home education. This will apply to children who are subject to ongoing enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 2004, children who have a child protection plan, and children who are attending a special school. Where those children are already being educated at home, local authorities will be able to consider whether that is in their best interests and to assess the suitability of their home learning environment. If that leads to a determination that home education is not in the child's best interests, the local authority will be able to issue a school attendance order.

Local authorities currently maintain voluntary registers of home educated children in their area. This will be made a legal requirement and authorities also required to share data from their registers with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. This will allow us to develop a stronger understanding of home education numbers and drivers at local and national levels and determine policy responses where home education has been chosen for reasons other than the provision of suitable education to a child.

■ Postgraduate Education: Students

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, is she will make an estimate of the number of postgraduate students currently studying in UK universities that are (a) UK citizens and (b) non-UK citizens.

Janet Daby:

The department does not hold citizenship data for higher education (HE) students. However, data on the domicile (permanent address) of HE students, is available via the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sb269/figure-9>. In the academic year 2022/23, there were 426,515 UK-domiciled postgraduate students and 455,780 non-UK-domiciled postgraduate students enrolled at UK HE providers. These figures include both postgraduate taught and research students.

■ Pre-school Education: Finance**Mr Will Forster:****[19578]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of planned increases to (a) National Insurance Contributions and (b) the National Minimum Wage on the viability of early years providers; and what steps she plans to take to ensure nurseries are supported to prevent closures.

Matt Bishop:**[19579]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to financially support (a) nurseries and (b) early years providers for increases to (i) the National Minimum Wage and (ii) employer National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Morgan:

Since July, this government has had to take some tough decisions to get our public finances back on track, but we are continuing to invest in the early years sector, supporting the delivery of the entitlements and recognising the vital role the sector plays in giving children the best start in life.

The department expects to provide over £8 billion for early years entitlements in the 2025/26 financial year, which is a more than 30% increase compared to 2024/25, as the department continues to rollout the expansion of the entitlements to eligible working parents of children aged from nine months.

On 10 December, the department published details of local authorities' early years entitlements funding for 2025 to 2026. The funding rates for 2025/26 include funding to reflect the national living wage announced at the Autumn Budget 2024.

HM Treasury are also increasing the Employment Allowance to £10,500 and expanding this to all eligible employers, meaning some smaller providers may pay no National Insurance at all in the 2025/26 financial year. The government has confirmed that public sector employers, including those in the early years sector, will be compensated for the increase in their National Insurance contributions.

On top of over £8 billion through the core funding rates, the department is also providing an additional £75 million in an expansion grant for 2025/26 to support the sector in this pivotal year to grow the places and the workforce needed to deliver the final phase of expanded childcare entitlements from September 2025. This is in addition to the largest ever uplift in the early years pupil premium, increasing rates by

over 45% to up to £570 per eligible child per year. This unprecedented increase is an investment in quality early education for those children who need it most, in the areas that need it most to tackle childcare deserts and give children the support they need to be 'school ready' at age 5 and go on to achieve and thrive.

The department has regular contact with each local authority in England about their sufficiency of childcare and any issues they are facing. Where local authorities report sufficiency challenges, the department discusses what action the local authority is taking to address those issues and, where needed, supports the local authority with any specific requirements through our childcare sufficiency support contract.

■ Pre-school Education: Standards

Lee Anderson:

[19391]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support early childhood education providers to ensure that three-quarters of five-year-olds are school ready in (a) under-resourced and (b) other areas.

Stephen Morgan:

Giving young children the best start in life is the foundation of the government's Opportunity Mission. Children's earliest years are crucial to their health, development and life chances. We have set a milestone of a record proportion of children starting school ready to learn in the classroom. We will measure our progress through 75% of children at the end of reception reaching a good level of development in the early years foundation stage profile assessment by 2028.

The government set out its next steps for delivering on this milestone in the Plan for Change published on 5 December. It will roll out government-funded childcare support to improve access, delivering the expansion to 30 funded hours, and supporting 3,000 new and expanded school-based nurseries, increasing the availability of high-quality childcare places where they are needed most.

The government will work in partnership with the sector, reforming training and support for the workforce to drive up standards. Only by listening to the expertise and experiences of those on the ground can we deliver this together.

We will work towards a stronger early years system, beginning with offering sustained professional development and working with providers to help spread evidence-based programmes as part of comprehensive plans to drive high-quality early education and care. We will ensure that the reception year sets children up for success in the rest of primary school, by rolling out schools' access to evidence-based programmes that boost early literacy and numeracy skills.

We will strengthen and join up family services to improve support through pregnancy and early childhood. This includes continuing to invest in and build up Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes to support early child health, parenting and home learning programmes. In addition, we will strengthen health visiting services for all families and improve early identification of special educational needs and disabilities.

In the Autumn Budget 2024, we provided an additional £1.8 billion to continue the expansion of government-funded childcare support for working parents in England, bringing total spending on childcare to over £8 billion in 2025/26.

As usual, hourly funding rates for providers offering the government-funded hours will vary between local authorities, reflecting local circumstances. On average, rates will rise to £11.54 for under 2s, £8.53 for two-year-olds and £6.12 for three and four-year-olds.

The government also announced, on 10 December, a new £75 million expansion grant, to be allocated later this year, to support nurseries, childminders and other providers to deliver the 35,000 additional staff and 70,000 places required to meet demand for September 2025.

The government will also deliver the largest ever uplift to the early years pupil premium, increasing rates by over 45% to up to £570 per eligible child per year. This unprecedented increase is an investment in quality early education for those children who need it most, in the areas that need it most, to give them the support they need to be 'school ready' at age 5 and go on to have the best life chances.

■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs

Richard Tice:

[19899]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of (a) the number of SEN pupils expected to transition to the state sector as a result of the introduction of VAT on independent school fees and (b) the cost to the state education system of those children moving from private to state schools.

Stephen Morgan:

His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) is responsible for VAT policy. HMT has published its assessment of the impacts of removing the VAT exemption that applied to private school fees, which can be found on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-on-private-school-fees/ac8c20ce-4824-462d-b206-26a567724643#who-is-likely-to-be-affected>.

This overall assessment considers special educational needs and disability (SEND) but does not provide a separate assessment broken down by SEND.

Overall, the government predicts that, in the long-term steady state, there will be 37,000 fewer pupils in the private sector in the UK as a result of the removal of the VAT exemption applied to school fees. This represents around 6% of the current private school population. This movement is expected to take place over several years, and most moves will occur at natural transition points. Of this number, the government estimates an increase of 35,000 pupils in the state sector in the long-term steady state, with the other 2,000 consisting of international pupils who do not move into the UK state system, and domestic pupils moving into homeschooling. This state sector increase represents less than 0.5% of total UK state school pupils, of which there are over nine million.

The government expects the revenue costs of pupils entering the state sector in England to steadily increase to a peak of around £0.3 billion per annum after several years. However, the government expects to raise around £1.8 billion per annum by 2029/30 from this VAT policy and from removing private schools' eligibility for business rates charitable rate relief.

Longer term impacts on those who move schools may be lessened by revenue raised by this measure being used to help the 94% of children who attend state schools.

It is important to note that pupils who need a local authority-funded place in a private school will not be impacted by the changes. The majority of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) are educated in mainstream schools, whether state-maintained or private, where their needs are met. The overwhelming majority attend state schools. To protect pupils with SEN that can only be met in a private school, local authorities that fund these places are able to reclaim the VAT they are charged on those pupils' fees.

The department supports local authorities to provide suitable school places for children and young people with SEND through annual high needs capital funding. This can be used to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings. At the Autumn Budget 2024, the government announced a £2.3 billion increase to the core schools' budget in 2025/26, increasing per pupil funding in real terms. This included a £1 billion uplift to high needs funding in 2025/26, providing additional support for the more than one million children in the state sector with SEND.

■ Schools: Dental Health

Ian Roome:

[R] [\[19834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on providing oral health (a) education and (b) other support in schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

All state-funded schools are required to teach about good oral hygiene as part of statutory health education. Pupils should know about dental health and the benefits of good oral hygiene and dental flossing, including the need for regular check-ups at the dentist.

Departmental officials regularly meet with officials from the Department for Health and Social Care to discuss oral health in schools and this government's commitment to introduce a national supervised toothbrushing scheme targeted at 3 to 5-year-olds living in the 20% most deprived areas of England. Further details on this scheme will be published in due course.

■ Schools: Finance

Damian Hinds:

[\[19671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17084 on Schools: Per Capita Costs, how much and what proportion of the additional funding will be used for pay increases already awarded to teachers in the 2025-26 financial year.

Catherine McKinnell:

In the 2024/25 financial year, the government announced almost £1.1 billion through the Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) to support schools with overall costs. This matches what the department had calculated is needed to fully fund, at a national level, the teacher and support staff pay awards in the 2024/25 financial year, after accounting for the available headroom in schools' existing budgets.

In the 2025/26 financial year, schools are receiving further funding to cover the remaining costs of the 2024 teachers' pay award. Funding for this will be sourced from within the £2.3 billion of additional schools funding announced at the Autumn Budget 2024.

For mainstream schools, the 2024/25 financial year CSBG has been incorporated into the schools national funding formula (NFF) in the 2025/26 financial year, ensuring that it forms an ongoing part of schools' core budgets. The NFF is increasing schools' funding by 2.23% per pupil on average in the 2025/26 financial year, compared to the 2024/25 financial year. This includes a 1.28% increase to ensure that the 2024 pay awards continue to be fully funded at national level in the 2025/26 financial year.

For special schools and alternative provision (AP), £90 million of the overall £1 billion increase in high needs funding allows the special and AP schools element of the 2024/25 CSBG to rise to a full-year equivalent of £235 million, which is being incorporated with the other teachers' pay and pensions grants into a single CSBG for special and AP schools in the 2025/26 financial year.

Local authorities are receiving £11 million in the 2024/25 financial year to cover centrally-employed teachers costs through the CSBG. In 2025/26, this will rise to £18 million and will be delivered through the Central School Services Block.

■ Schools: Great Yarmouth

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many children entered (a) primary and (b) secondary school in Great Yarmouth constituency in each of the last 10 years.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department publishes the number of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the Great Yarmouth constituency. This data is available in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' publication, which is based on the January school census. The

most recent figures can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

The publication webpage includes a school-level data file, listed under the dropdown heading 'Additional supporting files' as 'School level underlying data - 2023/24 (csv, 22 Mb)'.

This file contains one row per school. The data can be filtered by school phase and constituency. Column GZ provides headcount of pupils.

Data from other academic years is available via the 'Releases in this series' on the publication webpage. Data on parliamentary constituencies use boundaries as they were when the statistics were published.

■ Schools: Per Capita Costs

Damian Hinds:

[\[19672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17084 on Schools: Per Capita Costs, if she will provide these figures adjusted for inflation by the (a) retail price index and (b) consumer price index.

Catherine McKinnell:

The GDP deflator is the standard measure of inflation for public spending and is an appropriate measure for school costs. Therefore, the department does not produce estimates for the real terms increases in spending per pupil using the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index.

In the new year, the department will publish the School Cost Technical Note, which will provide an overall assessment for the balance between schools funding and costs in the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years.

■ Schools: Transport

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge:

[\[20077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help support City Of Wolverhampton Council to provide home-to-school transport for young people.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department's home-to-school travel policy aims to make sure no child is prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport. We know how challenging it currently is for local authorities to arrange home-to-school travel for all eligible children, and that the cost of doing so has increased in recent years. We are grateful for local authorities' considerable efforts in ensuring eligible children can continue to get to school.

Most central government funding for home-to-school travel is provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement, which is administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The government recognises the challenges local authorities are facing. That is why the Autumn Budget included the

announcement of £1.3 billion of new grant funding in the 2025/26 financial year for local government to deliver core services. Together with local income from council tax and business rates, this will provide a real terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2%.

Most of the increase in the cost of home-to-school travel can be attributed to transport for children with special educational needs. This is largely due to an increase in the number of children with education, health and care plans and the number of those children who have to travel long distances to a school that can meet their needs. The department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools so fewer children need to travel long distances to a school that can meet their needs. This will reduce home-to-school travel costs for local authorities over time.

The department publishes statutory guidance to assist local authorities in meeting their home-to-school travel duties, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>. Departmental officials host bi-monthly online meetings to which all local authority school travel officers are invited to share good practice and seek advice from one another and the department.

■ Shipping: Vocational Guidance

Sir John Hayes:

[18348]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that there is adequate careers (a) advice and (b) guidance in schools on maritime career pathways.

Janet Daby:

High-quality careers information, advice and guidance is key to helping young people make informed decisions about their future and involves finding out about and considering the different options available to them, including maritime industries.

As new technologies and industries emerge, it is critical that young people understand the breadth of careers and opportunities available and can make informed decisions about their future, including the value of technical and vocational pathways to employment. Good quality careers advice is essential if we are to ensure we meet the higher technical skills needs of our country.

Whilst an essential element of careers advice is that it is person-centred and impartial, the department's partner organisations provide a range of wider careers information and advice across all employment sectors, including maritime industries.

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) supports schools and colleges to embed best practice so that young people are aware of the full range of careers across all sectors of the economy.

The department also funds Careers Hubs, which lead partnerships of secondary schools, colleges, employers, combined authorities, local authorities and careers providers to help young people connect closely to local skills and economic needs

through a responsive careers education programme. Through this network, schools can engage with employers from a wide range of sectors to raise awareness of different career pathways and to improve careers education. This supports young people to make informed choices, and to develop the skills they need and employers want.

Sector bodies and individual employers can register their interest through CEC to support schools and colleges, for example through the Enterprise Adviser Network or as a Cornerstone Employer. Cornerstone Employers are a flagship group of employers from a range of sectors that work with networks of schools and colleges to improve careers education and make sure key skills for their sector are understood by teachers and education leaders.

Cowes Enterprise College has created Maritime Futures , an exciting model for integrating maritime into a mainstream curriculum at key stage 3, showcasing successful engagement between schools and employers. In discrete curriculum subjects, including mathematics, science, geography, history, art, the national curriculum content is taught through a maritime lens, using the wealth of learning opportunities the maritime sector presents.

Subject leaders work together so that learning in each discipline reinforces and enhances the learning in other subjects. Students apply the robust knowledge acquired to practical projects. For example, students build boats in design technology and apply what they have learnt on the physics of buoyancy, drag and variables. Local maritime employers advise on curriculum content and help deliver some lessons.

In addition, the National Careers Service, which is a free, government-funded careers information, advice and guidance service, draws on a range of labour market information to support and guide individuals. The service website gives customers access to a range of useful digital tools and resources to support them, including 'Explore Careers' which includes more than 130 industry areas and more than 800 job profiles, including a range of maritime roles ranging from merchant navy to boat building describing what those roles entail, qualifications and entry routes.

■ Sixth Form Colleges: Pay

Ian Sollom:

[\[18251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help resolve pay disputes with non-academised sixth forms who were not included in the 5.5% pay award announced for teachers.

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[18350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to implement the 5.5% pay award for teachers in all sixth form colleges.

Janet Daby:

The government does not set or recommend pay in further education (FE) providers, which have the freedom to make their own arrangements in line with their local circumstances.

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 throughout life.

That is why the October Budget 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.

Alison Bennett:[\[20104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to provide additional funding to non-academised sixth form colleges for increasing the pay of teachers to the same level as teachers in academised sixth form colleges.

Janet Daby:

The government is not responsible for setting or making recommendations about teacher pay in further education (FE) colleges, including sixth form colleges which unlike 16-19 academies are part of the statutory FE sector.

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 recognises the vital role that FE teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills they need to succeed in their education. The department will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

This builds on our investment to extend targeted retention incentive payments of up to £6,000 after tax to eligible early career FE teachers in key subject areas, including in sixth form colleges. The department is also delivering funding to support those young people who do not pass mathematics and English GCSE at 16, who are predominantly studying in FE.

The department has continued to offer financial incentives for those undertaking teacher training for the FE sector in priority subject areas. For the 2024/2025 academic year, training bursaries are worth up to £30,000 each, tax free, with further information about schemes for future years in due course. Additionally, we are supporting industry professionals to enter the teaching workforce through our Taking Teaching Further programme.

■ Special Educational Needs: Unemployment**Shivani Raja:**[\[17921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support young SEND people not in education, employment or training.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the right support to succeed in their education and develop the skills they need as they move into adult life.

The department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream settings, as well as ensuring specialist settings cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents' trust that their child will get the support they need. To support this, the department has created an Expert Advisory Group for Inclusion, led by Tom Rees, to advise on how to drive inclusive education practice.

Local authorities must provide to all young people aged 13 to 19, and to those between 20 and 25 with special educational needs, support it considers appropriate to encourage, enable or assist them to effectively participate in education or training. Local authorities are required to collect information about young people so that those not participating can be identified and given support to re-engage. Alongside this, there is also a guaranteed place in education and training for all 16 and 17-year-olds, expanded work experience and careers advice, action to tackle school attendance, and improved access to mental health services for young people in England. The department is working to further support all local authorities to identify and help young people at an increased risk of becoming not in education, employment or training, based on identifying risk factors such as a learning difficulty, disability or poor school attendance. This includes publishing good practice guidance and developing a new data tool for local authorities.

Through our new 'Youth Guarantee', this government will ensure that every young person aged 18 to 21 that needs it, is supported in accessing further learning or receives help to get a job or an apprenticeship. This guarantee will bring together and enhance provision and support for young people by offering them tailored support that will help them into further learning or fulfilling work. This will provide support for young people with SEND who may be particularly at risk of not being in education, employment or training. To respond to this challenge, this government will launch trailblazers in eight mayoral combined authorities starting from April 2025, with £45 million of funding being invested in 2025/26 to design and develop the guarantee.

Furthermore, as part of our commitment to helping children and young people with SEND to develop the skills they need as they move into adult life, the department is investing up to £18 million until March 2025 to build capacity in supported internships. The department aims to double the number of internships each year to around 4,500, to support more young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans to gain the skills to transition into employment. The department is also running a pilot in 12 local authorities to test supported internships with young people with SEND but no EHC plan who are furthest from the labour market.

■ Students: Loans**Dr Simon Opher:****[18684]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reforming the student loan finance repayment system to reduce monthly repayments for students in England.

Janet Daby:

The department is determined that the higher education (HE) funding system should deliver for our economy, universities and students. The government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university.

The department will set out this government's longer-term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

■ T-levels: Student Wastage**David Williams:****[17961]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to reduce dropout rates of students studying T-Levels.

Janet Daby:

This government wants all young people to have access to high-quality education options that enable them to learn the skills they need to progress in life and build successful careers.

T Levels are an excellent post-16 option for students, and we want to extend the opportunities they provide to as many young people as possible. The department has listened to feedback about barriers to delivery and taken action as a result. For example, we have announced updated approaches to industry placements, including allowing up to 20% of the placement to be remote, with up to 50% for T Levels in Digital. These changes which will unlock more opportunities for students and employers, while maintaining quality.

T Levels are still early in their implementation, and the retention rate is now improving. To support this, the department is raising awareness of T Levels with schools and careers advisers, backed up by case studies of students' experiences and access to face to face support to ensure they understand the requirements of T Levels and can advise students effectively.

The department has addressed issues specific to the Health and Science T Levels, which may have affected the second cohort of students. In September 2023, a new T Level in Health Qualification Specification was published, with changes to the core content, alongside a suite of support from the awarding organisation to help providers deliver the T Level effectively. The department expects retention rates to continue rising as providers become more familiar with delivering the courses, and we continue to support providers to deliver T Levels effectively.

■ Universities: China

Neil O'Brien:

[20252]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of scholarships offered by the Chinese Government for universities in the UK on freedom of speech.

Janet Daby:

The UK welcomes international partnerships and students, including from China, who make a very positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, our economy and society as a whole. However, we will always protect our national security interests, human rights and values.

All registered English HE providers have a duty to protect freedom of speech under the Education (No.2) Act 1986. They are also subject to registration conditions from the Office for Students (OfS) which requires them to uphold public interest governance principles, including securing freedom of speech within the law, academic freedom and accountability, such as operating openly and with integrity. The OfS can take action if it identifies a breach of this provision.

The UK government is carrying out an audit to examine the UK's interests with respect to China to improve our ability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses. The audit is being conducted as a cross-government exercise, led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

■ Young People: Unemployment

Andrew Cooper:

[19143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of young people out of work, education and training in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes statistics on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) for England from the labour force survey (LFS) for young people aged 16 to 24. This can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief>.

The number of 16 to 24-year-olds considered as NEET in England at the end of 2023 is estimated to be 709,600, 11.9% of the population. However, these estimates are only published at national level due to limitations with sample sizes for lower-level geographies. Therefore, NEET rates for young people aged 16 to 24 in the Mid Cheshire constituency and Cheshire cannot be provided.

However, local authorities are required to encourage, enable or assist young people's participation in education or training and return management information for young people aged 16 and 17. This data is published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>.

These figures show that of the 7,716 young people aged 16 and 17-years-old who were known to Cheshire East local authority, at the end of 2022, 205 were NEET or their activity was not known. This comprises 193 young people who were known to be NEET and 12 young people whom the local authority could not confirm their activity. This data is an average of December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023.

In Cheshire West and Chester local authority, of the 7,263 young people aged 16 and 17-years-old who were known to the local authority at the end of 2022, 329 were NEET or their activity was not known. This comprises of 274 young people who were known to be NEET and 55 young people whom the local authority could not confirm their activity. These statistics are published as transparency data, so some caution should be taken if using these figures. Data is not available for Mid Cheshire constituency.

In addition, 16 to 18 destination measures are published. These official statistics show the percentage of pupils not continuing to a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination in the year after completing 16 to 18 study, that is six months of continual activity. This can be used as a proxy for NEET at age 18. As Mid Cheshire was re-established as a constituency in 2024, no data is currently available, as the latest publication includes destinations in 2022/23. Data at parliamentary constituency level for 2022/23 can be found at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/819215d3-4c06-40ac-0f95-08dd167ca495>.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Carbon Capture and Storage and Hydrogen: Finance

Liam Byrne:

[20143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department plan to take to ensure value for money from the £3.9 billion of funding allocated for carbon capture and storage and green hydrogen in 2025-26.

Sarah Jones:

A formal part of the policy design and delivery process involves reviewing prior relevant efforts to ensure government is maximising value for money wherever possible. Our value for money judgement is evidenced by appraisal and analysis developed in line with the HMT Green Book and has supported policy development at each stage of the CCUS programme and the first Hydrogen Allocation Round (HAR1). All future carbon capture build out projects and subsequent HARs will require approved business cases, which will contain robust value for money assessments. The business models supporting both CCUS and electrolytic 'green' hydrogen are designed to address the risks that currently are a barrier to first of a kind projects, incentivise project behaviour in line with government objectives and deliver value for money for consumers and taxpayers.

Liam Byrne:

[\[20144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate his Department has made of the amount of private investment that will be raised for carbon capture and storage and hydrogen projects by the £3.9 billion of public funding announced in paragraph 3.52 of the Autumn Budget 2024.

Sarah Jones:

On 4th October, the government reached commercial agreement with the private sector and announced up to £21.7bn of available funding over 25 years to launch the UK's new carbon capture, usage and storage industry. We expect this funding to crowd in £8bn in private sector investment for the 25 years, and demonstrating the investability of CCUS will unlock a further pipeline of billions of pounds in private sector investment. It is estimated that industry has spent £1 billion in investment already. The government also announced over £2bn of funding over 15 years for the projects in the first Hydrogen Allocation Round (HAR1). These projects will invest over £400m of private capital during construction across the UK.

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Alcoholic Drinks**

Cat Smith:

[\[19332\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many alcohol industry representatives have Ministers in his Department met with since July 2024.

Michael Shanks:

I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave on 14 October 2024 to Question UIN [6511](#).

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[19658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) his core Department and its predecessor departments and (b) executive agencies of those departments at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Michael Shanks:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) was created in February 2023, so no information is held for periods prior to that date.

However, even though DESNZ was set up in February 2023, the spilt across GPC cards was not done at that point and was much later, all data prior to 2024 was recorded as BEIS, so we hold no DESNZ data for 2023.

■ **Drax Power: Disclosure of Information**

Daisy Cooper:

[\[20029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made representations to Drax on the increase in whistleblower reports recorded by the organisation between 2022 and 2023.

Michael Shanks:

The Government takes reports of complaints very seriously. Compliance with biomass sustainability criteria is a priority and Ofgem as the independent regulator is responsible for ensuring generators' compliance. Ofgem's recent investigation found that whilst Drax complied with sustainability standards, it had failed to report data accurately. This is a serious matter and Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations. Drax's subsequent £25 million redress payment underscores the robustness of the regulatory system.

Daisy Cooper:[\[20030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of reclaiming any portion of the subsidies provided to Drax Power Limited, in the context of the finding by Ofgem that Drax had misreported data in relation to their annual profiling submission between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, published on 29 August 2024.

Michael Shanks:

Compliance with biomass sustainability criteria is a priority and Ofgem as the independent regulator is responsible for ensuring generators' compliance. Ofgem's recent investigation found that whilst Drax complied with sustainability standards, it had failed to report data accurately. This is a serious matter and Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations. Ofgem did not find any evidence to suggest that Drax had been issued with subsidies incorrectly. Drax's subsequent £25 million redress payment underscores the robustness of the regulatory system.

■ Energy Supply**Nick Timothy:**[\[20051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has identified the (a) location and (b) severity of capacity constraints in the energy distribution network.

Michael Shanks:

Ofgem's price control supports network reinforcement to enable Distribution Network Operators to increase network capacity where required. Ofgem has published analysis of current and future capacity constraints in its framework consultation for the next electricity distribution price control period, beginning in 2028.

Ofgem will also promote data sharing and digitisation across DNOs to improve network visibility and reduce constraints.

In 2026, National Energy System Operator will publish Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP). RESPs will support coordinated development of the distribution system and enable long-term investment in capacity to be made with confidence and ahead of need.

■ Energy: Conservation

Henry Tufnell:

[20320]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has issued guidance to installation companies on the standards to which insulation and energy efficiency measures should be installed under government schemes.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Energy efficiency measures installed in households under current Government schemes must be done in accordance with the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2030 and PAS 2035 standards.

Installers under Government schemes must also be TrustMark registered. As the only Government endorsed quality scheme, TrustMark ensures compliance with the overarching PAS 2035 process and setting clear requirements to protect consumers across the multiple sectors operating in the energy efficiency market.

Henry Tufnell:

[20321]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what support his department is providing to members of the public who have concerns regarding the quality of insulation and energy efficiency measures fitted through government schemes such as ECO4.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

All installations under Government energy efficiency schemes, including the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme, must be carried out by a TrustMark registered business. Installations of low carbon measures must be carried out in accordance with the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) requirements.

TrustMark has set out a route to redress for any issues arising from measures installed under the scheme, which can be found at:

www.trustmark.org.uk/homeowner/support/complaints-process

■ Nuclear Power Stations: Migrant Workers

Nick Timothy:

[20338]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what information his Department holds on the number of foreign nationals employed at (a) Sizewell and (b) Hinkley nuclear power station by country of origin in each year from 2010 to 2024.

Michael Shanks:

The department does not collect information on the number of foreign nationals employed on the Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C projects.

Access to the critical systems for both reactors would be restricted to UK nationals only. The nuclear license holder will be obliged to meet security standards as set out by the Regulator.

■ Renewable Energy

Lauren Edwards:

[\[20557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking with his European counterparts to ensure that (a) cross-border energy projects and (b) the GridLink interconnector in Rochester and Strood constituency are completed to meet clean power targets.

Michael Shanks:

The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan outlines our approach to delivering a clean electricity system, including our approach to cross-border energy projects. It expects 12-14GW of electricity interconnection by 2030, up from the 9.8GW currently installed.

Under the UK-EU reset we are working with the EU to identify areas (such as electricity interconnection) where we can strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit.

GridLink's completion is, like all interconnector projects, contingent on the project receiving approval in both connecting countries. The project has regulatory approval in GB, however the French approval process remains ongoing. The UK Government has no role in this.

■ Renewable Energy: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[20150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much funding his Department plans to provide for renewable energy projects through the Clean Industries Bonus in Northern Ireland in 2025.

Michael Shanks:

Clean Industry Bonuses are to be awarded through a competitive process, with an initial budget of £27m per gigawatt of offshore and floating offshore capacity that applies for the bonus in the Contracts for Difference Allocation Round 7. Given the competitive process, we cannot guarantee or predict who will win funding, though of course offshore wind developers may invest in firms in Northern Ireland as part of the scheme.

■ Renewable Energy: Prices

Nick Timothy:

[\[19979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department is taking steps to mitigate against the risk of potential price increases in (a) offshore wind, (b) onshore wind, and (c) solar energy.

Michael Shanks:

To protect against rising costs for clean energy supply chains the Government is working across the economy on specific clean power policy actions. These include exploring where international collaboration can support supply chains, including via trade agreements and international co-operation. The Government is further

determined to work with other countries to diversify supply chains. To match the scale of the deployment challenge the Government will be driving an increase in capacity of our domestic clean energy workforce. As set out in the Clean Power Action Plan, the Government is also minded to implement a package of targeted reforms to the Contracts for Difference scheme, designed to secure the volumes of clean electricity we need at a competitive price.

■ **Sizewell C Power Station: Finance**

Nick Timothy: [19988]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much public investment has been directed to Sizewell C in each year since 2022.

Michael Shanks:

The Government has announced funding provided to Sizewell C in the following financial years: £100m in 2021/22, £679m in 2022/23, £1,811m in 2023/24 and £1,200m in 2024/25 to date.

■ **Warm Homes Plan: Insulation**

Shaun Davies: [20458]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December to Question 16276 on Warm Homes Plan: Insulation, whether the Warm Homes Plan will support investment in loft insulation protection.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's Warm Homes Plan will support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills. We will set out full details in due course.

Shaun Davies: [20459]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December to Question 16276 on Warm Homes Plan: Insulation, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of (a) public awareness of and (b) access to loft insulation protection.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's retrofitting tool 'find ways to save energy in your home' (<https://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency>), provides tailored guidance to help consumers make their homes greener and cheaper to run.

All businesses installing measures under Government schemes and initiatives must be certified to Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2030 and follow PAS 2035 standards. In the next review of the standards, the British Standards Institute (BSI), who publish PAS 2030 and 2035, will consider how to address more innovative products that do not fit within existing annexes, subject to steering group consensus.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Sir Desmond Swayne:****[901884]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of temporarily closing the capital grants scheme for new applications on farmers.

Daniel Zeichner:

We have allocated the largest ever budget for sustainable food production through the farming budget. In the first week of December, we paid £343 million into the rural economy, benefiting more than 31,000 farmers. After unprecedented demand, parts of the Capital Grant have been temporarily closed. We are reviewing the offer and will provide a further update in early 2025.

■ **Agriculture: Finance****Dave Robertson:****[17342]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the budget allocation for the Animal and Plant Health Agency in Weybridge for the financial year 2025-26 is included within the £500 million uplift for agricultural spending for the same period; and how much was spent from the agricultural budget for farms in Lichfield constituency in the last three years.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Spending Review confirmed Defra's budget for 2024-25 and 2025-26. The settlement provides £5 billion total departmental expenditure limit over two years (2024-25 and 2025-26) to support the transition towards a more productive and environmentally sustainable agricultural sector in England, ensuring food security. It also confirms £208 million funding across 2024-25 and 2025-26 to support the transformation of the Government's biosecurity facilities at Weybridge. More detailed budgets will be set following the department's business planning exercise. The department does not hold constituency level spending information for the farming budget.

■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Robbie Moore:****[18233]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent (a) meetings and (b) other discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on proposed changes to (a) Agricultural and (b) Business Property Relief.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues. Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[18731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the NFU mass lobby on 19 November 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

Farmers are the backbone of Britain, and we recognise the strength of feeling expressed by farming and rural communities in recent weeks. We are steadfast in our commitment to Britain's farming industry because food security is national security.

It's why we are investing £5 billion into farming over the next two years – the largest amount ever directed towards sustainable food production, rural economic growth and nature's recovery in our country's history. This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing.

But with public services crumbling and a £22 billion fiscal hole that this Government inherited, we have taken difficult decisions. The reforms to Agricultural Property Relief ensure that wealthier estates and the most valuable farms pay their fair share to invest in our schools and health services that farmers and families in rural communities rely on.

■ **Agriculture: Subsidies**

Tim Farron:

[\[16710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on the timeline for announcing the phase-out of direct payments under the Basic Payment Scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

There is no change to the timeline for phasing out delinked payments. We plan to pay delinked payments each year from 2024 to 2027.

■ **BSE**

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[19082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the discovery of a case of atypical BSE in a cow in Scotland on UK agriculture.

Daniel Zeichner:

BSE is not a contagious disease. There is no risk to animal and human health or food safety as a result of this isolated case.

Unlike classical BSE, which occurs through the consumption of contaminated feed, atypical BSE is believed to occur spontaneously at a very low level in all cattle populations. There have been just 3 cases in the UK since 2014.

The animal was tested under our surveillance system, demonstrating its effectiveness.

British beef remains safe to eat and can continue to be exported to trading partners.

Atypical BSE is not a notifiable disease for the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). This case does not affect our WOAH ‘controlled’ risk status for BSE, nor the application submitted in August this year to have it further reduced to ‘negligible’.

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry: **[18908]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Daniel Zeichner:

(a) Published departmental transaction level data on government procurement card (GPC) purchases for transactions over £500 in accordance with policy are at the following link:

<https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/710cd410-0724-4aac-b891-e48e9ec50d66/defra-government-procurement-card-spend-transactions-over-500>

The guiding policy setting out the requirement to publish GPC transactions over £500 remains in place. Guidance is available to all government departments on gov.uk at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement_Cards_-_Pan_Government_Policy_V4_06042020.pdf

The policy clearly sets out the standard that departments must publish to which covers

transaction date, transaction reference, merchant name and the amount spent.

(b) The following table sets out the core department’s expenditure using government procurement cards for transactions under £500 for each of the calendar years stated.

2022	2023	
Value of Transactions under £500	£356,046	£388,007

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Staff**

Mr Peter Bedford: **[18053]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many employee settlement agreements there were in his Department in each year since 2020; and what the total value of such agreements is.

Daniel Zeichner:

Between 2020 and 2024 to date, Defra has agreed six settlement agreements: one in 2021, two in 2022, two in 2023 and one in 2024 to date. The total cost of these settlements is £234,200.

Farmers: Advisory Services**Jayne Kirkham:**[\[17704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the Farming Resilience Fund beyond March 2025, in the context of phasing out the Basic Payment Scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Farming Resilience Fund (FRF) was developed to help farmers through the early years of the Agricultural Transition, specifically to assist farm businesses to adapt to the initial reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) by providing specialist business advice. BPS was replaced in England with delinked payments in 2024. We plan to pay delinked payments each year from 2024 to 2027, and the amount received will decrease each year as we apply progressive reductions.

To date, over 25,000 farmers have received 1-2-1 support. The FRF will conclude March 2025. Farmers yet to receive any support are therefore encouraged to contact the organisations listed on gov.uk before the end of December 2024.

Defra has received feedback suggesting many participants have recognised the value of the advice provided and it is our hope that many of the relationships and connections built through the FRF will continue beyond the scheme's official end date.

In the Budget announced in October, the Government announced £5 billion for the farming budget over two years - the largest ever directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history. As we continue to optimise our schemes, Defra will carefully consider the findings from the FRF, alongside other advisory programs, to shape what any future support offer might look like.

Farms: Floods**Blake Stephenson:**[\[14708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of flooding of agricultural land on UK food security.

Daniel Zeichner:

We recognise that the recent period of wet weather has impacted UK agriculture. On 13 November we announced that additional financial support will be provided to rural communities, recognising the importance of preventing flooding for farmers and protecting food security.

Defra is providing a one-off £75 million Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Fund, to accelerate IDBs' recovery from the winter 2023 -24 storms and to modernise and upgrade assets.

More than 12,700 farmers impacted by the severe wet weather, including Storms Babet and Henk, between October 2023 and March 2024, have received recovery payments totalling £57.5 million from the Farming Recovery Fund. These are one off recovery payments which will support land recovery activities such as soil remediation, recultivation and the removal of debris caused by flooding.

■ Flood Control: Finance

Mike Martin:

[18460]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of funding (a) water meadows and (b) other natural water management strategies.

Emma Hardy:

Nature and catchment-based solutions in the water sector have an important role to play. Natural flood management (NFM) is a key part of our approach to mitigating flood risk, and can involve floodplain meadows when designed and located appropriately

Natural England support the role of nature-based solutions (NBS), like water meadows in resolving multiple pressures on the water environment. NBS are a core pillar of Natural England's five-year aims.

The Environment Agency is increasingly looking to nature to enhance ecosystem services, reduce risks, and build resilience in rivers, estuaries, and coastal waters. Using NBS involves protecting existing natural functions, restoring ecosystems, and recreating landscapes. NBS benefit wildlife, food security, and resilience to floods and droughts. Restoring floodplains and water meadows reduces pollution from intensive agriculture while improving aquifer recharge, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity ([CIEEM, 2022](#)). Projects like [Mires for Moors](#) show how peatland restoration and upland reforestation reduce runoff, prevent sewer overflows, and mitigate flooding, as seen in the [Ullswater Catchment](#).

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[18932]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what funding is available for individual property-level flood protection for frequently-flooded communities.

Emma Hardy:

We are investing £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. Property level flood resilience measures can be funded as part of wider flood alleviation schemes.

The list of projects to receive Government funding in 2025/26 will be consented over the coming months in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees with local representation.

Build Back Better offers householders up to £10,000 to add property level resilience measures, where it can be offered as part of a flood insurance claim, over and above work to repair damage and loss caused by a flood. We want to see 100% of the UK domestic insurance market offering Build Back Better.

■ Flood Control: Independent Water Commission

Mike Martin:

[\[18461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Independent Water Commission will have powers to approve natural water management approaches.

Emma Hardy:

On 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system, to fundamentally transform how our water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

The scope of the commission is detailed in its terms of reference, available on GOV.UK. It includes specific mention of enabling the greater use of nature-based solutions where these represent good value for money.

The commission will provide a report to the Government by Q2 2025 with recommendations to the Secretary of State and Welsh ministers. Once the commission has made recommendations, both Governments will respond and consult on proposals, including potential legislation.

■ Flood Control: Rural Areas

Cameron Thomas:

[\[18333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle extreme flooding in (a) Tewkesbury constituency and (b) rural communities.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is investing £2.4 billion over this year and next year to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences – benefitting both rural and urban communities.

The Environment Agency is currently working with partners on property flood resilience schemes to residential homes most regularly affected by flooding in Tewkesbury, including at Abbey Terrace.

To speed up scheme delivery and ensure the challenges facing businesses and rural and coastal communities are adequately taken into account, a consultation will be launched in the new year which will include a review of the formula.

The Government has also announced £50 million of additional investment into internal drainage boards and £60 million in payments to farmers impacted by last year's severe weather through the Farming Recovery Fund.

■ Food Supply

Amanda Hack: [\[17958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to implement a national food strategy.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is developing an ambitious food strategy which will set the food system on the path for long-term success, ensuring it is able to feed the nation, realising its potential for economic growth, boosting our food security, improving our health, and ensuring environmental sustainability now and in the future.

We know this will require a whole-of-Government effort – the issues the food system faces cut across the work of many Departments. We also know that this is not a job for government alone. We will work side-by-side with industry and stakeholders across the food system to deliver lasting change, forming a partnership that draws on shared expertise and collective commitments, backed by a clear vision and framework for change.

■ Food Supply: Biodiversity

Joe Morris: [\[20454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the National Food Strategy will include the role of biodiversity in the food supply.

Daniel Zeichner:

Our ambitious food strategy will set and deliver clear long-term outcomes that create a healthier, fairer, and more resilient food system, and in doing so will consider elements of the food system that can contribute towards those outcomes.

■ Food: Public Sector

Joe Morris: [\[20453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress he has made with Cabinet colleagues on ensuring that at least half of all food purchased by the public sector is locally-produced and sustainable.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government continues to have an ambition for half of all food supplied into the public sector to be sourced locally or certified to higher environmental standards, whilst being in line with WTO and domestic procurement obligations. Defra continues to engage across Government Departments to develop proposals which support this ambition, as well as driving net zero, public health and animal welfare outcomes.

■ Foot and Mouth Disease

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[19080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the level of risk posed by foot and mouth disease to the UK.

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[19081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the level of the UK's disease response capability in relation to foot and mouth disease.

Daniel Zeichner:

To reduce the risk of foot and mouth disease (FMD) to the UK, in collaboration with our National Reference Laboratory and international partners, Defra monitors the threat presented by different trade routes and works. The risk of incursion is currently considered to be low. This risk evaluation informs our preparedness activities from targeting of measures at the border, domestic disease surveillance, to the strains procured for our vaccine bank and any communications to raise the awareness among livestock keepers.

Specific measures in place to reduce the risk of FMD incursions include requiring imported meat and dairy products to be accompanied by animal and public health certification confirming that they come from an area that is free from FMD; strict rules for the movement of animals and genetic material, and a ban on certain animal products as livestock feed. We continue to remind livestock keepers of the importance of maintaining strict on-farm biosecurity, compliance with the swill feeding ban, and the reporting of all suspicions of notifiable disease promptly.

Defra's contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases, the FMD control strategy and associated guidance describe the measures that need to be taken prevent and, in the event of an incursion, control outbreaks of FMD. The plans are reviewed and tested including through national response exercises and routine testing. The next exercise is currently being planned.

■ **Planning Permission: Air Pollution**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[18950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the requirements set out in the interim planning guidance on the consideration of the Environment Act PM2.5 targets in planning decisions, published in November 2024, on the (a) viability and (b) cost of new developments.

Emma Hardy:

The interim planning guidance is expected to have minimal impact on the viability and cost of new developments. It is interim guidance whilst Defra develops substantive technical guidance, and as such an assessment is not required.

■ **River Grom: Flood Control**

Mike Martin:

[\[18462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of a water meadow on the flow from South Tunbridge Wells Waste Treatment Works into the River Grom.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) continues to regulate Southern Water (SW) in the Tunbridge Wells area, including through the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP). The EA also monitor SW's permit compliance to drive required improvements. More widely, The Environment Agency are working with the wider community through the Medway Catchment Partnership to improve the quality of waterways in Kent.

As Southern Water's proposals for the next five-year Asset Management Period (AMP8) have not yet been agreed with Ofwat, the Environment Agency are unable to comment on future plans in the area. The Environment Agency will however make assessments of future schemes as appropriate.

■ **Rivers: Standards****Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[901885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve the water quality of chalk streams.

Emma Hardy:

Chalk streams are one of the rarest freshwater habitats on Earth and England is home to 85% of them. The Government is committed to the protection and restoration of our cherished chalk streams.

The best way to achieve this is by fixing the framework for managing our water system. We have also commissioned an independent commission of the water sector to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

■ **Transport: Storms****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[19079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on ensuring transport provision in areas affected by storms.

Emma Hardy:

Under the UK Government's Lead Government Department (LGD) model, the responsibility for severe storms and weather in England rests with the following organisations:

- Risk Identification and Assessment: The Met Office.
- Prevention/Resilience, Preparation and Emergency Response: The Cabinet Office (where the impacts are expected to be cross-cutting), DfT for Air, Rail, Roads and Ports and Defra for flooding.
- Recovery: DfT for Air, Rail, Roads and Ports. MHCLG for flooding.

Further detail can be found here: [The Roles of Lead Government Departments, Devolved Administrations and Other Public Bodies \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#)

Designated LGDs are responsible for leading work to identify serious risks and ensuring that the right planning, response and recovery arrangements are in place for their responsibilities. This includes if their sector is designated as a Critical National Infrastructure Sector (CNI), which Transport is.

Since the start of the current UK Storm Season on 1 September 2024, Defra has worked with DfT on the following:

- An exercise of the National Flood Response Centre.
- The operational response to flooding from caused by heavy rainfall September as well as named storms Ashley, Bert, Connall and Darragh.
- Reporting on damaged flood defences that could affect the operation of key transport infrastructure.

We hold monthly calls with DfT officials to share situational awareness and do these more frequently when the need arises. More detail on specific work undertaken by DfT and the Transport Sector on transport provision in areas affected by storms should be requested directly from DfT.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Afghanistan: Women

Munira Wilson:

[\[20031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether officials of the UK Mission to Afghanistan have asked the Taliban to reconsider its decision to ban women from accessing midwifery education.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is deeply concerned at reports of a ban on women accessing medical training in Afghanistan, including midwifery education. We strongly condemn the decision and officials from the Doha-based UK Mission to Afghanistan have met with Taliban leaders to urge them to reverse this decision. We have made clear that this is yet another affront to girls' right to education and will threaten the lives of countless women and girls who will be denied critical medical care, as well as their children. Officials continue to press the Taliban on human rights abuses in Afghanistan.

■ BBC World Service: Foreign Relations

Wendy Morton:

[\[19313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the BBC World Service on UK soft power and diplomacy.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The former UN Secretary-General described the BBC World Service as 'perhaps Britain's greatest gift to the world'. Independent studies show that the BBC's global

reputation contributes to perceptions of the UK as an attractive and trusted country. Against the backdrop of increased global competition, a new, hard-nosed strategy for soft power is crucial if we are to sustain the UK's international standing. The Foreign Secretary and Culture Secretary are establishing a new Soft Power Council to advise us on how we can support UK soft power at source and harness it effectively overseas. This will include the media. Tapestry Research carried out an international study in 2022, finding the BBC to be a particularly impactful British cultural export. It found, for example, that audiences who interacted with the BBC are more likely to want to visit the UK and invest in it.

■ Belarus: Sanctions

Wendy Morton:

[\[19314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of UK sanctions on Belarus.

Stephen Doughty:

Sanctions are carefully targeted to increase pressure over time. We regularly review our sanctions in order to maintain effectiveness. We therefore reserve the right to introduce further measures so that the Lukashenko regime continues to feel the consequences for its lack of respect for human rights and support for Putin's war. The UK will continue to work closely with our partners in holding Lukashenko to account.

■ China: Falun Gong

Blair McDougall:

[\[20341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help protect the Falun Gong community in China.

Catherine West:

The environment for freedom of religion or belief across China is restrictive, which includes the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

This Government will champion freedom of religion or belief for all abroad. We will work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora, and through bilateral engagement. For example, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised human rights recently with their counterparts, President Xi and Foreign Minister Wang, respectively.

■ China: Taiwan

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[19224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the 1972 Communique on the Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on an Exchange of Ambassadors, whether the Communique's position that Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic of China remains the position of the Government.

Catherine West:

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan, as set out in the 1972 Communiqué, has not changed and remains the position of this Government.

Blair McDougall:[\[20286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the statement by the Chinese Embassy to the UK entitled Embassy Spokesperson on a Taiwan-related motion concocted by a handful of British MPs, published on 29 November 2024, what the Government's policy is on whether Taiwan is a province of China.

Catherine West:

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan, as set out in the 1972 Communiqué, has not changed and remains the position of this government.

■ China: Water Supply**Blair McDougall:**[\[19809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of recent incursions by the Coastguard of the People's Republic of China into the restricted waters of the Kinmen islands.

Catherine West:

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan has not changed. The UK has a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. We consider the Taiwan issue one to be settled peacefully by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait through constructive dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion. We do not support any unilateral attempts to change the status quo, including increased Chinese assertiveness towards Taiwan.

■ Colombia: Peace Negotiations**Colum Eastwood:**[\[18675\]](#)

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 UN Secretary General's response to the Colombian government's rapid response plan aimed at overcoming delays in implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement.

Catherine West:

We welcomed the Colombian government's announcement of a new rapid response plan for implementation of the 2016 Agreement at the UN Security Council (UNSC) Session in July. In particular, we welcomed its focus on territorial transformation and the appointment of a senior Cabinet Minister responsible for its implementation. We continue to engage with the Colombian government to support them on this. During her visit to Colombia in November, Baroness Chapman met with Interior Minister Cristo to discuss the rapid response plan and reiterated our commitment to implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement. The Foreign Secretary also met with

Foreign Minister Murillo in September, to reiterate the UK's commitment towards the peace process in Colombia.

■ Colombia: Trade Unions

Kate Osborne:

[\[18647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of reports that the CUT trade union federation's (a) regional secretary and (b) treasurer in Valle del Cauca, Colombia have received death threats.

Catherine West:

We look to the Colombian authorities to investigate fully the threats against all citizens, including trade unionists, and to take appropriate action against those responsible. Through the Integrated Security Fund (ISF), the UK has historically supported the development of protection measures for human rights abuses, working with the Colombian government to strengthen the institutional capacity of the National Protection Unit and civil society organisations involved in the protection of social leaders, including trade unionists. During his visit to Colombia in November, Lord Collins, Minister for Human Rights, met with trade union representatives and other social and political leaders. In our UN Security Council statements, we regularly call on the Colombian government and its institutions to protect social leaders from threats.

■ Deserts

Sarah Champion:

[\[19301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of progress made towards tackling desertification at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Anneliese Dodds:

COP16 was the biggest and most inclusive Desertification COP to date. It marked a significant milestone, raising global ambition and mobilising finance to strengthen drought resilience, restore degraded land and combat desertification: issues critically interlinked with the UK's international development, climate and nature goals. We welcome the leadership the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia COP16 Presidency has shown in elevating these critical issues. Many important outcomes were achieved at UNCCD COP16, including over \$12 billion announced to support UNCCD issues over the next decade, and the launch of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership to scale support for vulnerable countries. There is further to go, including reaching an agreed global approach on drought resilience, that drives ambition, progress and delivery.

The UK is committed to supporting vulnerable countries to build resilience and scale action on drought, desertification, water security, and land degradation. Our £11.6 billion International Climate Finance commitment includes £1.5 billion for adaptation

in 2025 - a tripling from 2019 levels. This includes an initial investment in the Resilience and Adaptation Fund, which will help hundreds of thousands of vulnerable families across the world secure better access to food, water and productive land.

■ Development Aid: Children's Rights

Ben Maguire:

[\[19794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect the rights of children in countries experiencing the worst impacts of climate change.

Anneliese Dodds:

This Government is committed to the promotion, protection and realisation of children's rights. We know that children are disproportionately at risk from the effects of climate change, and children and young people will be at the forefront of shaping a resilient, sustainable future. The UK-led Glasgow Climate Pact urges Parties and stakeholders to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in multilateral, national and local decision-making processes. We championed this approach at COP29, where I met with youth climate activists from developing countries, and where UK Special Representative for Climate Rachel Kyte attended events alongside universities and the UN Youth Office to highlight the critical role of youth in climate action.

Ian Byrne:

[\[19947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the rights of children in countries most impacted by climate change.

Anneliese Dodds:

This Government is committed to the promotion, protection and realisation of children's rights. We know that children are disproportionately at risk from the effects of climate change, and children and young people will be at the forefront of shaping a resilient, sustainable future. The UK-led Glasgow Climate Pact urges Parties and stakeholders to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in multilateral, national and local decision-making processes. We championed this approach at COP29, where I met with youth climate activists from developing countries, and where UK Special Representative for Climate Rachel Kyte attended events alongside universities and the UN Youth Office to highlight the critical role of youth in climate action.

■ Development Aid: Reviews

Wendy Morton:

[\[19316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he expects Baroness Shafik's strategic review of international development to be (a) completed and (b) published.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Development Review has been submitted to the Foreign Secretary alongside the Global Impact and Economic Diplomacy reviews. The Development review is being considered by the Foreign Secretary and Minister for International Development. Consideration will then also be given to how best to communicate the independent reviews' findings which will be in the new year.

■ **Diplomatic Service****Wendy Morton:**[\[19317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of 5 December 2024, Official Report, column 519, what his planned timetable is for the introduction of a new right to consular assistance.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government is committed to strengthening consular services, including introducing a right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations. My department is considering a package of measures to achieve this, which we will announce in due course.

■ **Fawaz Akhras****Alicia Kearns:**[\[19058\]](#)

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 States' designation of Fawaz Al-Akhras for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, Bashar Al-Assad.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government's priority is to work closely with our allies, including the US, to prevent instability in Syria, ensure civilians are protected and provide humanitarian assistance to those who need it, while shaping an inclusive and peaceful transfer of power following the fall of Assad's brutal regime. The FCDO keeps all sanctions listings and evidence under close review.

Alicia Kearns:[\[19059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will designate Fawaz Al-Akhras for providing support to the Bashar Al-Assad regime.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The FCDO keeps all sanctions listings and evidence under close review. It is not appropriate to speculate on potential future designations, as to do so could reduce their impact.

■ Fuel Oil: Prices

Stephen Gethins:

[\[18871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on global price fluctuations in heating oil resulting from conflict in the Middle East.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign Secretary and I have had no discussions with our international counterparts on global oil price fluctuations caused by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[19400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans his Department has to support the work of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is one of the largest donors to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; committing £1.65 billion in the 2021-2025 period. This funding supports Gavi's mission to immunise 300 million children and save up to 8 million lives. There are a number of global health replenishments coming up in 2025. The UK is considering all future investments in the round and announcements will be made following the completion of the Spending Review.

■ Gaza: Defence Equipment

Apsana Begum:

[\[19053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any products made by Lockheed Martin UK are being used by Israel Defence Forces in operations in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19054]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any products made by BAE Systems are being used by Israel Defence Forces in operations in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19055]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any products made by Leonardo UK are being used by Israel Defence Forces in operations in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any products made by Mission Systems Wimborne Ltd are being used by Israel Defence Forces in operations in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

■ **Gaza: Health Professions**

Ben Lake:

[\[18600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps is he taking to help ensure that (a) protections under international humanitarian law for medical professionals in Gaza are upheld and (b) people who violate such protections are held to account.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

It is unacceptable that over 1000 health workers have reportedly been killed since 7 October 2023. Israel must do more to protect civilians and those working to support those in such desperate need. The UK has raised protection of civilians and the destruction of health infrastructure repeatedly with the Israeli government, including on 5 November when I underlined our grave concern to Israel's Ambassador about repeated strikes on Kamal Adwan hospital. This government is clear that International Humanitarian Law must be upheld, and civilians protected. The UK is fully committed to international law and fully respects the independence of the International Court of Justice and of the International Criminal Court. We have suspended relevant export licences to Israel following a review that concluded there is a clear risk that UK export items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of International Humanitarian Law.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

Andy McDonald:

[\[17107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies on the supply of aid to Gaza of the decision by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to pause delivery of aid to Gaza via Kerem Shalom.

Andy McDonald:

[\[17108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the capability of the UN World Food Programme to deliver food aid to Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The situation for humanitarian actors in Gaza is untenable. The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains the backbone of the humanitarian response, which is why the Government announced an additional £7 million of UK assistance to UNRWA's Flash Humanitarian Appeal for Gaza on 2 December. It is hugely concerning that UNRWA has been forced to pause

aid deliveries through its main crossing point at Kerem Shalom because of safety concerns. The World Food Programme, for which we also announced £6m of UK assistance on 2 December, reports that barely any food has entered northern Gaza for over 50 days. This is unacceptable. We continue to press Israel to end its aid restrictions and ensure the UN and humanitarian partners can work safely and effectively. This was reiterated in the Foreign Secretary's recent joint letter, with French and German counterparts, to Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar. I raised these issue's with Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel on 05 December and met with Mr Philippe Lazzarini, the UN's Commissioner-General of UNWRA in Doha on 08 December.

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[18683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much funding his Department has allocated to organisations supporting the delivery of aid in Gaza since 5 July 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has now announced £112 million for the Occupied Palestinian Territories so far this financial year, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank delivered through partner agencies. As part of this total, since July we have announced that the UK would reinstate £21m funding to UNRWA including £1m to implement the recommendations of the Colonna report, £5.5m for UK-MED to operate field hospitals in Gaza, £6 million for UNICEF to support vulnerable families in Gaza, in addition to UK-Kuwait joint funding totalling £4.5 million for UNICEF to continue their lifesaving aid in Gaza and Yemen, £1m to support the Egyptian Ministry of Health to care for medically evacuated Palestinians, £6m to both OCHA and WFP and £7 million of new UK funding to UNRWA's Flash Humanitarian Appeal for Gaza. On 11 December we announced an additional £13 million for UNRWA to provide essential services to Palestinian refugees in the OPTs, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

■ **Gaza: Israel Defense Forces**

Apsana Begum:

[\[19048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any products made by Elbit Systems are being used by Israel Defence Forces in operations in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs,

journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

■ **Gaza: Journalism**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart to lift the ban on journalists reporting from Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary, together with his French and German counterparts, wrote to the Israeli government to urge action on the unacceptable situation in Gaza. The UK has been clear that Israel must act in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and protect civilians, which includes journalists and media workers, and we call on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and guarantee the protection of journalists and media workers covering the conflict. On 02 November, I highlighted the ongoing situation in Gaza and those that had lost their lives in the name of press freedom. The UK remains committed to Media Freedom and to championing democracy and human rights around the world. Independent media is essential to a functioning society.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[17952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department uses journalistic reporting from Palestinian journalists in Gaza when conducting assessments into (a) the humanitarian situation and (b) Israeli military actions in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Our assessments are supported by a wide ranging and detailed evidence base. This includes relevant regional media reporting, including from Palestinian journalists, open-source material, analysis of the conflict by international bodies, NGOs and partner countries and statements and reports by the Israeli Government and military representatives, and the Palestinian Authority.

■ **Gaza: Journalism and Press Freedom**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[17950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect (a) journalists and (b) media workers (i) based and (ii) operating in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary, together with his French and German counterparts, wrote to the Israeli government to urge action on the unacceptable situation in Gaza. The UK has been clear that Israel must act in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and protect civilians, which includes journalists

and media workers, and we call on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and guarantee the protection of journalists and media workers covering the conflict. On 02 November, I highlighted the ongoing situation in Gaza and those that had lost their lives in the name of press freedom. The UK remains committed to Media Freedom and to championing democracy and human rights around the world. Independent media is essential to a functioning society.

■ **Gaza: Unmanned Air Vehicles**

Apsana Begum:

[19045]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any (a) quadcopter aircrafts, (b) components for quadcopter aircrafts and (c) technology used by quadcopter aircrafts (i) made and (ii) developed in the UK are being used in Gaza operations by Israel Defence Forces.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19046]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any (a) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), (b) components for UAVs and (c) technology used by UAVs (i) made and (ii) developed in the UK are being used in Gaza operations by Israel Defence Forces.

Apsana Begum:

[19047]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any (a) unmanned aircraft system (UASs), (b) components for UASs and (c) technology used by UASs (i) made and (ii) developed in the UK are being used in Gaza operations by Israel Defence Forces.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether Thor drones manufactured in the UK are being used in Gaza operations by Israel Defence Forces.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

Apsana Begum:

[19050]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether Magni-X drones manufactured in the UK are being used in Gaza operations by Israel Defence Forces.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Following the suspension of licences announced on 2 September, there are currently no extant export licences for items that we assess might be for use by the IDF in military operations in the Gaza conflict (except for F-35 components, which have been excluded from the ambit of the suspension). We continue to keep export licences for Israel under continual and careful review.

Licences where there is no clear risk the items could be used in military operations in the conflict remain extant. These cover items such as body armour for NGOs, journalists, components for trainer aircraft, items for re-export to third countries, or non-military controlled items such as technology for commercial aircraft, chemical manufacturing equipment, commercial satellite and spacecraft components.

■ Gaza: UNRWA

Andy McDonald:

[17109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for the UK government's support for

the UN's UNRWA mission in Gaza, of the approval by the Israeli Knesset of legislation regarding Israel's relations with UNRWA on 28 October 2024.

Andy McDonald: [\[17110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure the necessary conditions for (a) safe and (b) effective humanitarian operations by UNRWA in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have expressed serious concern at the UNRWA bills passed by Israel's Knesset. This legislation risks making UNRWA's essential work for Palestinians impossible, jeopardising the entire international humanitarian response in Gaza and delivery of essential health and education services in the West Bank. During her recent visit to the region, the Minister of State for Development urged Israel's deputy Foreign Minister Haskel to ensure that UNRWA can continue its vital operations. I raised this issue with Minister Haskel on 05 December and met with Mr Philippe Lazzarini, the UN's Commissioner-General of UNRWA in Doha on 08 December. We continue to work with our international partners to press Israel also to take the necessary steps to ensure safe and effective humanitarian delivery in Gaza, including through the Foreign Secretary's recent joint letter, with French and German counterparts, to Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar. The Development Minister underlined the UK's support for UNRWA by announcing, on 2 December, £7 million of UK assistance to UNRWA's Flash Humanitarian Appeal for Gaza.

■ Hong Kong: National Security

Wendy Morton: [\[19697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Hong Kong on the Hong Kong National Security Law.

Catherine West:

The Government is clear that the National Security Law imposed by Beijing on Hong Kong has eroded the rights and freedoms of Hong Kongers. The Foreign Secretary met with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in October where he raised Hong Kong and human rights.

I also raised concerns over the erosion of Hong Kong's rights and freedoms, including under the National Security Law, with Hong Kong and Chinese officials during my recent visit to Hong Kong in November.

■ Hong Kong: Official Secrets

Kate Osamor: [\[20666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to declassify documents on Hong Kong dated prior to 1 July 1997.

Catherine West:

Documents created about Hong Kong pre 1997 are part of the FCDO's ongoing high priority transfer programme to The National Archives. Currently we have transferred documents up to 1994 (Link to catalogue: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C15105>). We aim to have completed the transfer of all documents up to 1997 to The National Archives by approximately 2027.

■ **International Assistance****Christine Jardine:**[\[19751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the Government will take steps to re-establish a separate department for International Development.

Anneliese Dodds:

As set out in the 2024 Labour Party manifesto, the Government's plans are to strengthen international development work within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

■ **Iran: Christianity****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[19075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the persecution of Christians in Iran; and what diplomatic steps he is taking to help tackle that issue.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We condemn Iran's restrictions against Freedom of Religion or Belief. Christians, particularly converts from Islam, and other minority religions, continue to face severe repression in Iran. We were proud to help deliver the Iran Human Rights resolution, adopted by the UN Third Committee in November, which called on Iran to cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity and to ensure rights are upheld. We will continue to raise the issue directly with the Iranian government, including through our Ambassador in Tehran.

■ **Iran: Human Rights****David Taylor:**[\[19946\]](#)

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 report by the UN Special Rapporteur entitled Atrocity Crimes and grave violations of human rights committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (1981–1982 and 1988), published on 17 July 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are aware of the Special Rapporteur's report relating to "atrocities crimes" of the 1980s, including the summary, arbitrary and extra-judicial execution of dissidents.

The execution of dissidents and political opponents is a deliberate attempt to instil fear and stifle dissent. We will continue to support UN Special Procedures including the Special Rapporteur in their mandate to highlight the Islamic Republic's historic and current human rights violations. The UK was proud to help deliver the Iran Human Rights Resolution, adopted by the UN Third Committee in November, which called for Iran to establish a moratorium on executions and to end the persecution of political opponents.

David Taylor:

[\[19948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government plans to take in response to the July 2024 Atrocity Crimes report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are aware of the Special Rapporteur's report relating to "atrocity crimes" of the 1980s, including the summary, arbitrary and extra-judicial execution of dissidents. The execution of dissidents and political opponents is a deliberate attempt to instil fear and stifle dissent. We will continue to support UN Special Procedures including the Special Rapporteur in their mandate to highlight the Islamic Republic's historic and current human rights violations. The UK was proud to help deliver the Iran Human Rights Resolution, adopted by the UN Third Committee in November, which called for Iran to establish a moratorium on executions and to end the persecution of political opponents.

■ Israel: Foreign Relations

Stephen Gethins:

[\[20013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will list the meetings Ministers in his Department have had with Israeli officials since 7 December 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

FCDO Ministers meet with a wide range of officials, but there have been no official meetings with Israeli officials since 7 December 2024.

■ Israel: Gaza

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[17951\]](#)

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 Committee to Protect Journalists press release entitled, Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war, published 3 December 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary, together with his French and German counterparts, wrote to the Israeli government to urge action on the unacceptable situation in Gaza. The UK has been clear that Israel must act in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and protect civilians, which includes journalists

and media workers. The UK calls on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and guarantee the protection of journalists and media workers covering the conflict. On 02 November, I highlighted the ongoing situation in Gaza and for those that had lost their lives in the name of press freedom. The UK remains committed to Media Freedom and to championing democracy and human rights around the world. Independent media is essential to a functioning society.

■ Israel: International Law

Richard Burgon:

[\[18570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the average time period in weeks is for his Department to undertake an assessment of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The FCDO keeps Israel's commitment, capability to comply and record of compliance with International Humanitarian Law in relation to the Gaza conflict under regular review. The assessments, which are supported by a detailed evidence-base and informed by legal advice, take an average of 8 weeks to complete.

■ School Meals Coalition

Ellie Chowns:

[\[19559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of joining the School Meals Coalition.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is assessing the latest evidence on the impact of school feeding interventions on nutrition, education and social protection and continues to track developments in the evidence base for school feeding interventions. We note, for example, the World Bank's Investment Framework for Nutrition from October 2024 which states that investing in the first 1000 days of a child's life is more effective and cost-effective for preventing and reducing malnutrition. We are not a member of the School Meals Coalition but actively engage in global dialogue on school feeding through other processes, such as the World Food Programme's Executive Board, the G7 and the G20.

■ Syria: Armed Conflict

Stephen Gethins:

[\[20012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the last Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability strategic assessment was carried out on the situation in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

A Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) strategic assessment is an OFFICIAL SENSITIVE paper that is used to underpin UK national security strategies, as well as

UK government policy and programming. We do not publicly comment on the timings of specific JACS assessments.

■ Syria: Development Aid

Wendy Morton: [\[19311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support (a) public institutions and (b) the civil service in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to the fast moving events in Syria, speaking regularly to regional and other partners about the situation. These early discussions have focused on protecting civilians, including minorities, and moving quickly to a political transition. The UK stands ready to support a transition process that leads to credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance that ensures respect for the rule of law, universal human rights, the protection of all Syrians, transparency and accountability. We are urging all those seeking a role in governing Syria to prevent the collapse of state institutions.

■ Syria: Religious Freedom

Wendy Morton: [\[19310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support freedom of religion or belief for religious minorities in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has consistently underlined the importance of protecting all civilians in Syria, including religious and ethnic minorities, publicly and in its engagement with regional and international partners. We are closely monitoring the treatment of religious minorities.

The UK continues to champion Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all in Syria, and beyond. No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. Promoting FoRB is critical to building a sustainable future for all Syrians, advancing the recognition of cultural and religious diversity, while ensuring equality and human dignity for all.

■ Taiwan: Security

Alison Taylor: [\[20464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to support Taiwan's security.

Catherine West:

The UK has a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and has repeatedly stated this alongside our G7 partners. Without it, the prosperity and security interests of both the UK, and our global partners, would suffer. We consider the Taiwan issue one to be settled peacefully by the people on both sides of the

Taiwan Strait through constructive dialogue, and do not support any unilateral attempts to change the status quo. We continue to engage with Taiwan across a wide range of areas as part of our unofficial relationship.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Gloucestershire

Max Wilkinson:

[\[20531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support A&E Departments in Gloucestershire in winter 2024-25.

Karin Smyth:

Local winter resilience plans and resourcing are operational matters for the National Health Service. The national approach on priorities for winter planning was issued by NHS England on 16 September, setting out the key steps to be taken to support the delivery of high-quality care for patients this winter.

The NHS is managing extra demand over the winter period, by strengthening same day emergency care, offering more fall services for older people, and with upgraded 24-hour live data centres. I also made a statement on winter preparedness in the House of Commons on 18 December 2024.

■ Alzheimer's Disease: Drugs

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[20108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of NICE methodology in appraising innovative medicines for licensed for Alzheimer's Disease.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is responsible for the methods and processes it uses to develop recommendations on whether new medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of National Health Service resources. The NICE develops those methods and processes independently and in consultation with stakeholders.

The NICE keeps its methods and processes under review to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are appropriate to emerging new treatments, and has a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Lab that enables the NICE to develop creative solutions to complex problems in HTA. The HTA Lab produced a report in November 2023 on issues and challenges in the evaluation of disease-modifying dementia treatments. The report concluded that the NICE's current approach and methods are considered appropriate for evaluating these treatments.

The NICE has recently consulted on its draft guidance on the use of two new disease-modifying treatments for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. The NICE's guidance says that the benefits of these treatments are too small to justify the

significant cost to the NHS. These are very difficult decisions to make, and it is right that they are taken independently on the basis of the available evidence of costs and benefits.

■ **Blood Cancer: Romford**

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will take steps to improve blood cancer (a) diagnosis, (b) treatment and (c) outcomes in Romford constituency.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of innovative blood cancer treatments in Romford constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

It is a priority for the Government to support the National Health Service to diagnose cancer, including blood cancer, as early and quickly as possible, and to treat it faster, to improve outcomes for all patients across England, including in the Romford constituency.

The Department is committing to this by improving waiting times for cancer treatment, starting by delivering an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, to support faster diagnosis and access to treatment. In addition, NHS England has implemented non-specific symptom pathways for patients who present with non-specific symptoms, or combinations thereof, that can indicate several different cancers. This includes leukaemia, which can present non-specific symptoms, such as unexpected weight loss and night sweats. From our national evaluation, blood cancers are one of the most common cancer types diagnosed through these pathways.

The Department is committed to implementing the recommendations of Lord O'Shaughnessy's review into commercial clinical trials, making sure that the United Kingdom leads the world in clinical trials, and ensuring that innovative, lifesaving treatments are accessible to NHS patients, including those with blood cancer. Most recently, in response to the findings of Lord Darzi's independent investigation into the NHS, the Department has launched an extensive programme of engagement to develop a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS.

In September this year, NHS England announced a new targeted treatment, quizartinib, to be prescribed to newly diagnosed patients with a specific type of leukaemia, boosting their chance of remission and long-term survival, made available through the NHS England's Cancer Drugs Fund, which fast-tracks new innovative cancer treatments into standard care. This followed a previous announcement in August, announcing the new treatment, Zanubrutinib, for those with marginal zone lymphoma, which could halt the progression of their cancer and provide an alternative to further rounds of chemotherapy.

■ Bowel Cancer: Diagnosis

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[20164]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the number of cases of late diagnoses of bowel cancer in emergency NHS settings; and what steps he is taking to reduce this number.

Andrew Gwynne:

No recent estimate has been made. Data is only available up to 2020 from the National Disease Registration Service. The data for the year 2020 highlights that 24.4% of bowel cancer patients were diagnosed through emergency presentation.

It is a priority for the Government to support the National Health Service to diagnose cancer, including bowel cancer, as early and as quickly as possible, and to treat it faster, to improve outcomes. The Department is committing to this by improving waiting times for cancer diagnosis and treatment, starting by delivering an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, to support faster diagnosis and access to treatment.

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening programme currently invites people aged 56 to 74 years old for screening every two years. However, this age cohort is increasing to those aged 50 to 74 years old by 2025, which may reduce the number of late diagnoses.

Furthermore, NHS England runs Help Us Help You campaigns to increase knowledge of cancer symptom and address barriers to acting on them, to encourage people to come forward as soon as possible to see their general practitioner. This campaign urged people to take up the offer of bowel screening when invited.

■ Bowel Cancer: Health Education

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[20024]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to increase awareness of bowel cancer symptoms among people under 50.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England runs Help Us Help You campaigns to increase knowledge of cancer symptoms and address barriers to acting on them, to encourage people to come forward as soon as possible to see their general practitioner. The campaigns focus on a range of symptoms, as well as encouraging 'body awareness' to help people spot symptoms across a wide range of cancers at an earlier point. Previous phases of the campaign have focused on abdominal symptoms which, among other abdominal cancers, can be indicative of bowel cancer.

NHS England and other National Health Service organisations, nationally and locally, also publish information on the signs and symptoms of many different types of cancer, including bowel cancer. This information is available on the NHS.UK website.

■ Breast Cancer: Research

John Milne:

[\[20813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will meet the hon. Member for Horsham and Dr Susan Michaelis, founder of the Lobular Moon Shot Project, to discuss his Department's work on invasive lobular breast cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Health Mission sets the objective of building a National Health Service fit for the future. As part of that work, and in response to the Darzi report, we have launched an extensive programme of engagement to develop a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts, from hospitals to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

In addition, following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will develop a new national cancer plan. The cancer plan will include more details about how to improve outcomes for all tumour types, including lobular breast cancer, and ensure that patients have access to the latest treatments and technology.

We are now in discussions about what form that plan should take, and what its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider Health Mission should be, and will provide updates on this, including on publication dates, at the earliest opportunity. We would encourage the Hon. Member for Horsham and Dr Michaelis to input to the process, which would help to shape the national cancer plan.

■ Cancer: Children and Young People

Clive Jones:

[\[20825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the costs associated with children and young people travelling within the UK for cancer treatment.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England and the integrated care boards are responsible for commissioning and ensuring the healthcare needs of local communities in England are met, including for children and young people with cancer.

The National Health Service in England runs schemes to provide financial assistance for travel to a hospital, or other NHS premises, for specialist NHS treatment or diagnostics tests, when referred by a doctor or other primary healthcare professional. This includes the NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS), which provides financial assistance to patients who do not have a medical need for transport, but who require assistance with the costs of travelling to receive certain NHS services. Patients who do not qualify for the HTCS and who are on a low income may be able to claim the costs from the Department for Work and Pensions through Universal Credit or Personal Independence Payment.

■ Cancer: Research

Clive Jones:

[R] [\[19828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve research capacity for cancer in the (a) Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire integrated care board and b) NHS in England.

Andrew Gwynne:

Through the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR), the Department invests in building research expertise and capacity, and specialist facilities and support services, to support research across all aspects of human health, including cancer.

Since 2006, the NIHR has supported 189 personal career development awards for researchers working on cancer, as well as 526 awards through the NIHR Integrated Academic Training Programme for doctors and dentists, which combines research training with clinical training. The NIHR also supports the Cancer Research Transatlantic Development and Skills Award and co-funds fellowships with the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission, focussed on research into brain cancer.

The Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMCs), co-funded by the NIHR and Cancer Research UK, act as a United Kingdom-wide network, bringing together world-leading laboratory and clinical researchers to test new treatments for adults and children with cancer. Other infrastructure supporting cancer research includes the NIHR Biomedical Research Centres (BRCs) and Clinical Research Facilities (CRFs), many of which have specialist expertise in cancer.

The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board benefits from infrastructure supporting cancer research, including the Oxford and Southampton ECMCs, BRCs and CRFs, and the South Central Regional Research Delivery Network.

■ Cancer: Young People

Clive Jones:

[R] [\[20317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase levels of awareness on the (a) signs and (b) symptoms of cancer among young people and their families.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to getting the National Health Service catching cancer on time, diagnosing it earlier, and treating it faster, so that more patients survive this horrible set of diseases. This includes in relation to children and young people.

NHS England and other NHS organisations, nationally and locally, publish information on the signs and symptoms of many different types of cancer, including those that are most common in children. Further information on cancer signs and symptoms is available on the NHS.UK website.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with cancer, and we are considering the next steps to take forward work in this area through the relaunch of Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce.

■ Change NHS: Costs

Rupert Lowe: [20088]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost to the public purse is of Change NHS.

Karin Smyth:

The public and staff must be at the centre of the development of the plan to make the National Health Service fit for the future, so it makes a positive impact on their day-to-day lives. That is why we are running a series of in-depth deliberative events and have launched an open platform to hear from members of the public and those who work in health and care.

The events are being delivered within the Department's budget as part of its responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of everyone in England. We are determined to do this in a way that gives everyone the chance to get involved, while also ensuring value for money. At this point in time, we are not able to provide accurate costs for the whole engagement exercise, because it is still ongoing.

■ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Health Services

Tessa Munt: [20200]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to publish the findings of the consultation entitled Improving the experiences of people with ME/CFS: interim delivery plan, published on 9 August 2023.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to improving the care and support for people with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS), also known as chronic fatigue syndrome. We recognise how devastating the symptoms can be, and the significant impact they can have on patients and their families.

We published a summary report of the responses to the 2023 consultation on the interim delivery plan on 19 December 2024. The responses to that consultation, along with continued close engagement with stakeholders, will inform the development of the final ME/CFS delivery plan, which we aim to publish by the end of March 2025. The plan will focus on boosting research, improving attitudes and education, and bettering the lives of people with this debilitating disease.

The report is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-experiences-of-people-with-mecfs-interim-delivery-plan/outcome/improving-the-experiences-of-people-with-mecfs-consultation-outcome>

■ Colchester Hospital: Staff

Pam Cox:

[\[15260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is satisfied that the decision by East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust to outsource staff at Colchester hospital meets the requirements that (a) social value is mandatory within contract design and that (b) public bodies carry out a public interest test when considering procurement options, in the context of the Make Work Pay programme.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 27 November 2024]: Following established procurement guidance, the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust has confirmed that a 10% Social Value criteria, covering social value, enhanced sustainability and environmental outcomes, was included in the specification for the market testing exercise for potential external suppliers to deliver 'Soft' Facilities Management (FM) services across its sites.

Pursuant to the Government's public interest test, National Health Service trusts are not obliged to accept any bids submitted unless they clearly demonstrate value for money and deliver against the aims and objectives of the business cases. Following consideration of a final Full Business Case, the trust announced on 9 December 2024 that the Board has decided to award a contract to an external supplier for the future delivery of 'Soft' FM services across all its sites. The Government expects the trust to share its assessment of how the contract meets the test with local stakeholders.

The Government expects the trust to ensure that any such outsourced services are delivered in a way that improves quality, ensures greater stability and longer-term investment in the workforce; and delivers better value for money as part of the broader commitments on procurement, as set out in the 'Make Work Pay' programme.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Correspondence

Adam Dance:

[\[20545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of his Department's response times to correspondence from hon. Members.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government attaches great importance to the effective and timely handling of correspondence from MPs, Peers, and members of the public. The Department receives some of the highest, and most sensitive, volumes of correspondence. This year, we are forecast to receive over 65,000 queries, with over 15,000 of those from Hon. Members.

The Department is committed to responding to 80% of Hon. Members' correspondence within 20 working days where possible. Ministerial correspondence performance data is published annually by the Cabinet Office.

■ Diagnosis and Medical Equipment

Clive Jones:

[R] [19537]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps (a) his Department and (b) NHS England are taking to support the use of (a) medical devices and (b) diagnostic tools after piloting; and what funding his Department provides for such tools and devices.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department and NHS England provide support to innovators and systems across the innovation lifecycle, from ideation and design, through to adoption and scaling. A number of policies and programmes are targeted at the adoption of medical devices and diagnostic tools after piloting.

In February 2023, the Department published its first ever strategy for MedTech, as well as the One Year On Report in April 2024, outlining our priorities for improving the adoption and spread of safe, effective, and innovative medical technologies across the National Health Service.

To help innovators ‘find the front door’ of the NHS, the NHS Innovation Service supports the creation of an Innovation Record and enables support from at least one of 25 organisations, including the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), the Medicines Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority, the National Institute of Health Research, the Health Innovation Network, and the NHS Supply Chain, which provide support across research and testing, to adoption and spread. To date, this service has supported 870 innovations.

There are several programmes which directly support early-stage innovators and innovations in designing, developing, and scaling their innovations. The Clinical Entrepreneur Programme is the world's largest entrepreneurial workforce development programme. The NHS Innovation Accelerator provides innovators with support and mentorship to enable adoption of high impact products with demonstrable clinical benefit. The Small Business Research Initiative Healthcare funds the acceleration of innovations to tackle unmet health and care needs. The Innovative Device Access Pathway, with system partners, is supporting eight transformative technologies by providing regulatory and access requirements in route to market. Furthermore, NHS InSites supports the NHS to develop its innovation capability infrastructure.

To support later stage innovations with scale and adoption, there are two programmes that have been in place. The MedTech Funding Mandate aims to accelerate equitable patient access to selected NICE recommended technologies, with 12 technologies accelerated to date. Commissioners are mandated to fund these technologies from existing allocations. Additionally, the Health Tech Adoption and Accelerator Fund, investing approximately £28 million to integrated care boards in 2022/23, supports the procurement and implementation of 81 different technologies, mostly supporting virtual wards, at home management, and elective recovery.

Spending decisions for use and expansion of new technology is subject to regular review as part of usual financial planning processes.

The adoption of innovative products across the NHS is supported by the Innovation Dynamic Purchasing System, aiming to reduce barriers to entry for small to medium size enterprises bringing innovation into the NHS.

Looking forward, a consultation on a proposed integrated rules-based pathway was launched by NHS England and the NICE in May 2024, which laid out the creation of a predictable, consistent pathway to access and adoption of medical technology. This would also support technology that had already been piloted to scale in the system. The consultation closed in September 2024 and responses are currently being reviewed.

■ **Dietetics: Apprentices**

Alex Sobel:

[\[20245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the number of dietetic apprenticeships.

Karin Smyth:

We will refresh the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan next summer, to ensure the National Health Service has the right people, in the right places, with the right skills to deliver the care patients need, when they need it. This will include how we ensure that we train, through all training routes, and provide the staff the NHS needs, including allied health professionals such as dieticians, to care for patients across our communities.

■ **Drugs: Newbury**

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[19572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support research in the pharmaceutical sector in Newbury.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department funds research and research infrastructure, which supports patients and the public to participate in high-quality research across the United Kingdom, through the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR).

Development and delivery of research in the pharmaceutical sector is supported and enabled nationwide through NIHR infrastructure, including the NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN), the NIHR Clinical Research Facilities (CRFs), the NIHR Biomedical Research Centres (BRCs), and the newly designated NIHR Commercial Research Delivery Centres (CRDCs). These all support the delivery of clinical research through facilities, staff resource, collaborations, and funding.

In Newbury, pharmaceutical research benefits from the South Central RDN, as well as the Oxford and Southampton-based CRFs and BRCs, and from April, a new

CRDC in Southampton, all of which support a range of pharmaceutical studies in the region.

In order to maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient, and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to implementing the recommendations from Lord O'Shaughnessy's independent review of commercial clinical trials in full. We expect these efforts to attract more commercial investment in clinical research and yield a broad and diverse portfolio of clinical trials in the United Kingdom, to provide innovative treatment options for patients.

■ **Drugs: Shortages**

Mike Martin:

[\[20533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a Medicines Shortages Task Force.

Karin Smyth:

While there are no plans to establish a Medicines Shortages Task Force, there is a team within the Department that deals specifically with medicine supply problems. They work closely with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the pharmaceutical industry, NHS England, and others operating in the supply chain to help prevent shortages and to ensure that the risks to patients are minimised when shortages do arise.

The resilience of United Kingdom's supply chains is a key priority, and we are continually learning and seeking to improve the way we work to both manage and help prevent supply issues, and avoid shortages for patients. The Department, working closely with NHS England, is taking forward a range of actions to improve our ability to mitigate and manage shortages and strengthen our resilience. However, medicine shortages are a complex and global issue and everyone in the supply chain has a role to play in addressing them, as any action will require a collaborative approach.

There are approximately 14,000 medicines licensed for supply in the UK, and while most are in good supply, there can sometimes be supply issues with a limited number of medicines. Supply disruption is an issue which affects the UK, as well as the other countries around the world. High-profile medicine supply issues have been global in their nature.

■ **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Diagnosis**

Kim Leadbeater:

[\[20048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve the process for families to obtain a diagnosis for foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department asked the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to produce a quality standard in England for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), to help the health and care system improve both diagnosis and support for people affected by FASD. The quality standard also covers support during pregnancy, to improve awareness and prevent the disorder. It was published in March 2022, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs204>

The Department has also taken a number of steps to help prevent FASD. The UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines, published in 2016, provide clear advice to women not to drink alcohol if they are planning for a pregnancy or are pregnant, and these are available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80b7ed40f0b623026951db/UK_CM_Os_report.pdf

The National Health Service's website offers advice on the use of alcohol during pregnancy and sources of support, which includes speaking to a general practitioner, midwife, or local treatment service, or contacting the Government's Talk to Frank website. The NHS's website and the Talk to Frank website are available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/drinking-alcohol-while-pregnant/>
www.talktofrank.com/contact-frank

The Department will soon be publishing the first ever clinical guidelines on alcohol treatment for the United Kingdom. The aim of the guidelines is to promote and support good practice. The guidelines will set out how maternity, alcohol treatment, and other healthcare professionals should support women to reduce or stop their alcohol use as quickly and safely as possible, to reduce the ongoing exposure of the foetus to alcohol and the risk and severity of future disability.

Health: Disadvantaged**Andrew Cooper:****[20374]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle health inequalities in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Andrew Gwynne:

The United Kingdom faces significant health inequalities, with life expectancy varying widely across and within communities. The Government is committed to building a fairer Britain by tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to poor health, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

Existing initiatives to reduce inequalities in relation to health services in England include NHS England's Core20PLUS5, which focuses on improving the five clinical areas at most need of accelerated improvement in the poorest 20% of the population,

along with other underserved population groups identified at a local level, including groups that share protected characteristics, and socially excluded groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities' North West Regional Team provides system leadership for population health and for reducing health inequalities across the North West. Mid Cheshire local authorities, the Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Cheshire East Council, received a combined total of £36.9 million in Public Health Grant funding for 2024/25. This provides services such as stop smoking, drug and alcohol treatment, health visiting and school nursing, sexual health, and NHS Health Checks, among others, all of which contribute to addressing health inequalities.

Across Cheshire and Merseyside, partners are working together as part of the All Together Fairer collaborative to improve health equity and the social determinants of health, through measurable actions for each place, to create a fairer, more equitable society.

■ Heart Diseases: Young People

Sir John Hayes:

[19998]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to raise awareness of sudden deaths in young people due to undiagnosed heart conditions.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England published a national service specification for Inherited Cardiac Conditions (ICC) in 2017, which defines the standards of care expected from organisations funded by NHS England. This specification covers young adults with previously undiagnosed cardiac disease. The aim of the ICC services is to improve the diagnosis, treatment, and outcome of patients with inherited cardiac conditions. NHS England is currently reviewing this service specification, working with a broad range of stakeholders as part of the review, including National Health Service clinical experts, the Association of Inherited Cardiac Conditions, Cardiomyopathy UK, Heart Valve Voice, and the British Heart Foundation.

Sir John Hayes:

[19999]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to increase access to heart screening for young people through sports and community clubs.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) last reviewed screening for sudden cardiac death (SCD) in people under 39 years old in 2019 and concluded that screening should not be offered. More information on this is available at the following link:

<https://view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk/sudden-cardiac-death/>

Research showed that current tests are not accurate enough to use in young people without symptoms, and that treatments and interventions were not based on good scientific evidence to prevent SCD.

We are aware that the UK NSC has received a submission via its annual call process to consider SCD screening in young people aged between 14 and 35 years old engaging in sport. The UK NSC is currently reviewing all annual call proposals. More information on the annual call process is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-annual-call-submitting-a-screening-proposal/uk-nsc-annual-call-how-to-submit-a-proposal>

■ Hospitals: Admissions

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[20019]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of patients admitted to hospital this year with (a) Covid, (b) flu (c) RSV and (d) norovirus; and what those figures were for the same period in (i) 2023 and (ii) 2022.

Karin Smyth:

The data is not available in the format requested for flu, the respiratory syncytial virus, or norovirus. The following table shows the number admissions with COVID-19, in each of the last three years:

YEAR	NUMBER OF ADMISSIONS WITH COVID-19
2024	27,594
2023	46,085
2022	123,924

Source: data is from NHS England, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-hospital-activity/>

Note: data is only available for 2024 from 1 January to 30 November.

■ NHS: Negligence

Sir Ashley Fox:

[19960]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has taken recent steps to reform the fixed recoverable costs for lower-value clinical negligence claims.

Sir Ashley Fox:

[19961]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of alternatives to Fixed Recoverable Costs for lower-value clinical negligence claims.

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[19962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of introducing Fixed Recoverable Costs in clinical negligence on vulnerable people's ability to access justice.

Andrew Gwynne:

Currently, the Government is considering the way forward on a wide range of matters, including clinical negligence costs reform, and we will announce our position in due course.

■ **Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy**

Mike Martin:

[\[20534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of supply chain issues surrounding the importing of Creon into the United Kingdom on patients with pancreatic diseases; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of Creon being imported into the United Kingdom.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has been working with suppliers to address the current supply issues with Creon, which is a brand of pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT) used by patients with conditions such as cystic fibrosis and certain cancers, including pancreatic cancer. The supply issues with Creon are impacting countries throughout Europe and have been caused by the limited availability of raw ingredients and manufacturing capacity constraints to produce volumes needed to meet demand. These issues have resulted in knock-on supply disruptions of alternative PERT medications.

The Department is continuing to work with all suppliers of PERT to help resolve the supply issues in the short and longer term by asking that they expedite deliveries, source stock from other markets, and increase production. The Department has also reached out to specialist importers of unlicensed medicine to understand whether they can source unlicensed imports of Creon to help mitigate this supply issue. Where such imports have been sourced, the Department has worked with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to expedite regulatory processes.

■ **Preventive Medicine and Public Health: Youth Services**

Helen Maguire:

[\[20122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of youth services on (a) the Government's prevention agenda and (b) achieving positive outcomes for public health.

Andrew Gwynne:

Youth services play a vital role in supporting the Government's prevention agenda and for achieving positive outcomes for public health. These services provide early intervention and support that can prevent the development of more serious health

and social issues, including mental health challenges, substance misuse, and physical health problems.

The Department recognises the importance of youth services in promoting healthy behaviours, building resilience, and improving mental and physical wellbeing among young people. In the context of mental health, the Government's commitment to improving outcomes for babies, children, and young people is outlined in the publication *Improving the mental health of babies, children, and young people*, which highlights the value of preventative approaches and the role of youth-focused interventions. Further information on this publication is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people-a-framework-of-modifiable-factors>

■ **Primodos: Research**

Esther McVey:

[19678]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 12696 on Primodos: Research, when the minutes and outcome of the November Commission on Human Medicines discussion will be published.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), together with the wider Government, have committed to reviewing any new scientific evidence which comes to light.

The new publication by Danielsson et al has been reviewed by the MHRA and advice has been sought from the Government's independent advisory body, the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM), who have provided their independent expert advice on our assessment of whether the findings of the latest publication justify a further review. The MHRA will consider the recommendations given by the CHM before deciding whether any further action is warranted.

The minutes of the November CHM meeting will be made publicly available through the GOV.UK website at the earliest opportunity.

■ **Processed Food**

Sir Ashley Fox:

[20414]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the minutes from the recent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition horizon scan meeting of 9 October 2024 on ultra-processed foods.

Andrew Gwynne:

United Kingdom dietary recommendations are based on independent advice from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN). The SACN publishes minutes for all its meetings on its GOV.UK webpages.

On 9 October 2024, the SACN held a horizon scan meeting, at which the committee discussed the topic of processed foods and health. Papers for these meetings are available on the SACN webpage, at the following link:

<https://app.box.com/s/yuxmdx4jfxmgxycji08mc5hw51plu942>

Draft minutes of this meeting will be published on the SACN webpage early in 2025. The SACN webpage is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-committee-on-nutrition#sacn-meetings>

The SACN is planning to publish an update review on processed foods and health in 2025.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening

Jim Shannon:

[20211]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of spirometry tests carried out in Community Diagnostic Centres in each of the last five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department does not currently hold validated data on the number of spirometry tests carried out in Community Diagnostic Centres. NHS England publishes data quarterly detailing the total activity carried out in Community Diagnostic Centres nationally, although this does not include activity by specific test type. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/CDC-Management-Information/>

■ Skin Diseases: Steroid Drugs

Dr Marie Tidball:

[20518]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to help increase knowledge of topical steroid withdrawal for (a) GPs, (b) Dermatology departments and (c) medical schools.

Karin Smyth:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has reviewed topical steroid withdrawal reactions, and first communicated about these reactions in September 2021 via our Drug Safety Update, which is read by a wide range of health care professionals. This communication is available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/topical-corticosteroids-information-on-the-risk-of-topical-steroid-withdrawal-reactions

The MHRA has continued to monitor reports of topical steroid withdrawal, and in 2024 it undertook a further review, which is available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/topical-steroids-introduction-of-new-labelling-and-a-reminder-of-the-possibility-of-severe-side-effects-including-topical-steroid-withdrawal-reactions.

During this review, further advice was sought from dermatologists, the National Eczema Society, and the Commission on Human Medicines. Consequently, the MHRA is taking forward a number of actions, including updated warnings in the product information, and the inclusion of information regarding the potency of topical steroids on the packaging. The MHRA is also engaging with the British Association of Dermatologist, who have released an updated statement, which is available at the following link:

<https://cdn.bad.org.uk/uploads/2024/02/22095550/Topical-Steroid-Withdrawal-Joint-Statement.pdf>

Following this engagement, the British Association of Dermatologists has formed a Topical Steroid Withdrawal Working Party Group (TSW WP), in collaboration with the National Eczema Society, Scratch That, the Primary Care Dermatology Society, and the British Dermatological Nursing Group. The aim of the TSW WPG is to produce an expert consensus and guidance on supporting people with concerns about topical steroid withdrawal, including a Patient Information Leaflet, and any revision to the joint statement, as appropriate. The joint statement is available at the following link:

<https://www.bad.org.uk/topical-steroid-withdrawal-joint-statement/>

■ Smoking: Public Houses

Charlotte Nichols:

[20276]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take legislative steps to allow pubs to designate outdoor smoking and vaping areas.

Mr Peter Bedford:

[20406]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take legislative steps to protect designated outdoor pub smoking and vaping areas.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill was introduced to Parliament on 5 November 2024, and passed its second reading in the House of Commons on 25 November 2024. The bill will put us on track to a smoke-free United Kingdom, helping to reduce approximately 80,000 preventable deaths and reduce the burden on the National Health Service and on the taxpayer.

The bill contains powers to extend the ban on smoking indoors to certain outdoor settings, to reduce the harms of second-hand smoking, particularly around children and vulnerable people. In England, we are considering extending smoke-free outdoor places to outside schools, children's playgrounds, and hospitals, but not to outdoor hospitality settings such as pub gardens. The bill also has powers to make most public places and workplaces that are smoke-free, vape-free.

Exactly which settings should become smoke-free and vape-free will be a matter for secondary legislation, with all proposed reforms subject to a full consultation.

■ Sports: Medicine

Mark Pritchard: [\[20187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to bring forward legislative proposals on regulating sports therapists.

Karin Smyth:

The Government has no plans to extend statutory regulation to sports therapists at this time.

■ Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme

Adam Jogie: [\[20091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the the adequacy of the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS) continues to process a significant number of claims, with 11,251 claims related to COVID-19, adult flu, and other diseases processed between 1 November 2021 and 13 December 2024.

The Department is working with the NHS Business Services Authority, the administrators of the scheme, to take steps to improve the VDPS by modernising operations, improving claimants' experiences, and processing claims at a faster rate.

Ministers have also met with the families of those who have suffered harm following COVID-19 vaccination, many of whom raised the need for reform of the VDPS. Whilst any changes to the VDPS may need to be a cross-Government decision, ministers have agreed to look closely at the issues raised.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Contracts

Rupert Lowe: [\[19507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will publish a breakdown of material sub-contractors for that contract.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if

she will make an estimate of the number of social tension incidents reported per local authority associated to the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse was of (a) translation and (b) interpretation costs associated with the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse was of (a) taxi and (b) public transport associated with the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will make an estimate of the potential cost to the public purse of (a) healthcare and (b) dental costs associated with the contract; and if she will make an estimate of the number of (i) GP and (ii) dental appointments arranged.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse was of food vouchers issued via this contract.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will breakdown service users by (a) sex and (b) age.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, how many call outs for reactive maintenance services were made under the contract; and if she will make an estimate of the average waiting time for reactive maintenance services.

Rupert Lowe: [19515]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse is of cash given to service users as an emergency measure associated to the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [19516]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse was of legal advice issued in relation to the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [19517]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will make an estimate of the number of (a) violent and (b) aggressive incidents reported by the provider to her Department.

Rupert Lowe: [19518]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will make an estimate of the number of (a) arrests and (b) enforcement notices reported to his Department as a result of the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [19519]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will make an estimate of the number of antisocial behaviour incidents reported to her Department via the contract provider.

Rupert Lowe: [19520]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse is of (a) furnishing and (b) decorating associated with the contract.

Rupert Lowe: [19521]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021,

what the potential cost to the public purse is of cleaning services associated with the contract.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, what the potential cost to the public purse was of recreational activities provided via the contract.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's procurement contract entitled Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW, reference CF-0155600D58000000L5A4EAK3, published on 9 April 2021, if she will publish a copy of all information packs provided to service users.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office does not hold the information sought in these questions at the level of granularity requested.

Collating and verifying that information for the purposes of answering these questions could only be done at disproportionate cost, and would also require the exclusion of any commercially sensitive material.

■ **Border Security Command: Staff**

Nick Timothy:

[\[19994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many staff work in the Border Security Command; and how many of those staff were not previously working on small boat crossings.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Right Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 14 October to Question UIN 6818.

■ **Dangerous Driving: West Bromwich**

Sarah Coombes:

[\[20315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle illegal street racing in West Bromwich constituency.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Any form of anti-social, dangerous or inconsiderate behaviour involving any vehicle is a serious issue. Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for the Government, and a key part of the Safer Streets Mission.

Excess speed is a major cause of death and serious injury on our roads so anyone who breaks the speed limit should expect to face proper sanction.

We recently announced plans to strengthen the law so that these vehicles can be seized by police when they are used to commit anti-social behaviour, including illegal street racing, without having to issue a warning which delays enforcement action. This will allow them to swiftly deal with vehicles being used anti-socially.

■ Electric Vehicles: Batteries

Mike Amesbury:

[19757]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the number of battery fires there have been relating to electric (a) cars, (b) bikes and (c) scooters since 2022.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects data on incidents attended by Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs), with this data including the cause of the fire and the source of ignition. This data is published in a variety of publications, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-statistics>.

Data collected through the Incident Recording System (IRS) does not include data on whether fire incidents attended were caused by or involved batteries, for electric cars, electric bikes or electric scooters.

We are in the process of replacing the IRS, and intend to update the data it collects, covering both the questions and answer categories included within the forms. Adding new categories, including lithium-ion batteries, electric vehicles, e-scooters and e-bikes, to the data collection are options being developed to reform the IRS with a modern, secure, and flexible system.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Unmanned Air Vehicles

Matt Vickers:

[19883]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to promote the wider adoption of drones by fire services.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Fire and Rescue Services have been early adopters of drones which can improve decision making, operational efficiency and reduce risk to firefighters. We work closely with the National Fire Chiefs Council which co-ordinates the use of Fire & Rescue Service Drones, ensuring services are aware of new technology and the benefits available.

Fire and rescue authorities are operationally independent from government and decisions on how their resources are best deployed to meet their core functions and keep their communities safe are a matter for each fire and rescue authority, based on its analysis of risk and local circumstances. Any consideration of equipment, including drones, will be part of this process.

■ Foreign Influence Registration Scheme

Alicia Kearns:

[20280]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to announce which countries will be included in the enhanced tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.

Dan Jarvis:

Work is underway to identify which foreign powers will be placed on the enhanced tier, based on robust security and intelligence analysis.

We will set out our approach to the use of the enhanced tier, including which foreign powers and foreign power-controlled entities will be specified, in due course.

■ Knives: Crime

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[19888]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans the Government has to tackle knife crime amongst (a) young people and (b) young people in the black community.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Halving knife crime over the next decade is a key part of the Government's mission to take back our streets. We are taking a range of steps to realise this ambition.

We have banned Zombie style knives and zombie style machetes.

We have set up a Knife-Enabled Robbery Taskforce, which brings together Ministers, Chief Constables and others working across criminal justice to take immediate action to tackle the fastest rising type of knife crime.

We have formed the Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime that brings together campaign groups, families of people who have tragically lost their lives to knife crime, young people who have been impacted and community leaders, united in their mission to save lives and make Britain a safer place for the next generation.

We launched a consultation to help our plans for an effective ban of Ninja Swords.

We have launched a review into the online sale and delivery of knives to identify any gaps in current processes and legislation. We are also consulting on introducing personal liability measures on senior executives of online platforms or marketplaces who fail to take action to remove illegal content relating to weapons.

We will also create a new Young Futures programme - intervening earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime. It is vital we have a system that can identify and support those young people who need it most.

■ Migrants: Detainees

Ian Byrne: [\[19867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a maximum 28 days statutory time limit for immigration detention.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I would like to refer the Honourable Member to the written answer I gave to the Honourable Member for Stroud on 29 November 2024 (UIN 15894).

■ Mohamed Lidow

Alicia Kearns: [\[20277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the immigration status was for Mohamed Lidow at the time he committed the manslaughter and rape of Natalie Shotter.

Alicia Kearns: [\[20278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the immigration status was of Fawzi Omar when he committed a sexual assault on 8 May 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

My thoughts are with the victims of these appalling crimes and their families, and I applaud the work of the police forces who brought perpetrators for these crimes to justice.

The Honourable Member will understand that, even in such appalling cases, the personal data of the perpetrators, including immigration and citizenship status, is exempt from release if disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

■ Motor Vehicles: Theft

Luke Taylor: [\[19495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle car thefts in Sutton and Cheam constituency.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is determined to drive down vehicle crime and we are working with the automotive industry and law enforcement to ensure our response is as strong as it can be.

We continue to work closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for vehicle crime, through the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, to take forward a programme of work, focusing on prevention and deterrence of theft of and from vehicles.

This government is committed to bringing forward legislation to ban electronic devices used to steal vehicles, empowering the police and courts to target the criminals using, manufacturing and supplying them.

■ Overseas Students: Ukraine

Mike Martin:

[\[20501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 16106 on Overseas Students: Ukraine, whether students who have extended visas under the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme and whose graduation date falls after the expiration of that visa will (a) be allowed to remain to complete their studies and (b) retain home fee status for the duration of their course.

Seema Malhotra:

Those granted permission under the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme will receive the same rights and entitlements to access work, benefits, healthcare and education as provided under the existing Ukraine Schemes.

Individuals with permission under one of the Ukraine schemes will have access to standard immigration routes to remain in the UK, in order to complete higher education courses they commence during their initial period of permission.

Where a person's Ukraine scheme permission expires during their course of study and they are granted further permission to remain under one of the standard immigration routes, they will continue to be eligible to access student support and home fee status while they complete their studies.

■ Police: Unmanned Air Vehicles

Matt Vickers:

[\[19882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to promote the wider adoption of drones by police forces.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The decision to use drones and in which circumstances are operational matters for police forces who are subject to the requirements of the Air Navigation Order and Data Protection legislation when operating drones.

Drone technology is developing at a rapid pace, and therefore, in FY24/25 the Home Office has allocated over £4m to support national police-led programmes of work to support police use of drones and explore the benefits that future drones' capabilities may provide to police operations - including, standardising police operations, trialling innovative use of drones to improve police productivity, and supporting the progression of a future operating model for police aviation that considers both crewed and uncrewed aircraft.

■ Refugees: Employment

Rupert Lowe:

[19506]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish (a) the total cost to the public purse for, (b) a breakdown of services provided under contracts related to and (c) a list of companies contracted to deliver services for the Refugee Employability Programme.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Details of contract values, breakdown of services and companies contracted for the Refugee Employability Programme are available on the Find a Tender service link at <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Notice/023030-2023?origin=SearchResults&p=1>.

■ Resettlement: Afghanistan

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[20151]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to introduce further pathways under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.

Seema Malhotra:

We are determined to honour our commitment to those who supported us in Afghanistan and who stood up for freedom and democracy, placing their own lives at risk.

As of September 2024, we have brought around 33,400 individuals from Afghanistan - or a third country - to safety in the UK. This includes British Nationals and their families, Afghans who loyally served the UK and others identified as particularly at-risk, such as campaigners for women's rights, human rights defenders, Chevening scholars, journalists, judges and members of the LGBT+ community.

Afghan Operational data is viewable at: [Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data).

Our priority right now is the relocation of individuals accepted for resettlement through our established schemes, alongside fixing the gaps in our existing routes. That is why this government has already implemented a specific route under the ACRS to reunite Afghan families unintentionally separated during Operation Pitting. The window for referrals was open from 30 July and closed on 30 October. We have already begun to see arrivals and families be reunited.

Further information is viewable at: [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme).

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Buildings: Insulation****Mike Amesbury:**[\[19763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's Remediation Acceleration Plan, published on 02 December 2024, what is her planned timetable for working with insurers to consider the potential merits of supporting the industry with reducing fire-related liabilities for the duration of remediation programmes.

Alex Norris:

Buildings insurance premiums remain unacceptably high for many leaseholders in buildings with fire safety issues, who have been paying too much for too long.

My officials have already started working with the insurance industry, as announced in the Remediation Acceleration Plan, to consider whether, for the duration of remediation programmes, government might support industry to reduce fire related liabilities, in order to reduce the high insurance bills some leaseholders are facing.

■ Buildings: Repairs and Maintenance**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**[\[20238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of reforming the non-qualifying leaseholder status for building remediation funding.

Alex Norris:

We understand that many leaseholders are frustrated by the limits of qualifying status set out in the Building Safety Act.

The principle of the leaseholder protection package is to protect leaseholders living in their own homes in unsafe buildings. They also seek to balance the rights of leaseholders who own additional properties with those freeholders (not connected with the developer) who, like the leaseholders, were innocent in the creation of the emerging defects.

To achieve this balance a threshold was set at ownership of up to three properties in total, to cover those individuals who had purchased properties primarily to live in. The inclusion of up to three properties was aimed at giving protection to, for example, those who had been unable to sell flats that they had been forced to move out of, e.g. because of a growing family.

The Government has committed to review how to better protect leaseholders from costs and take steps to accelerate the pace of remediation across the country.

In the meantime, there is a range of support for those leaseholders whose lease does not qualify for protection under Part 5 of the Building Safety Act 2022. This includes support with cladding remediation and protection for their principal residence on 14 February 2022 if it is in a relevant building above 11 metres or five storeys.

Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**Kevin Hollinrake:** [20231]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the letter to her from the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China of 4 December 2024, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of involvement of the United Front Work Department in the planning process for the called-in Chinese Embassy planning application.

Alicia Kearns: [20282]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to assess national security considerations when determining whether to grant planning permission for a new Chinese Embassy in Tower Hamlets.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question [HL3240](#) on 19 December 2024.

Alicia Kearns: [20283]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) Ministers and (b) officials in her Department have had discussions with representatives of the Chinese government on the application to build a new Chinese Embassy in Tower Hamlets.

Matthew Pennycook:

Officials in my Department have met with representatives of the People's Republic of China. The purpose of this engagement was to explain the operation of the UK planning system. Details of the application for a new Chinese embassy were not discussed.

Community Ownership Fund**Ann Davies:** [20500]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will provide an update to applicants who successfully submitted a stage one bid to the Community Ownership Fund on the next stage of the process.

Alex Norris:

Applicants to the Community Ownership Fund (COF) were required to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form and have this approved as a first stage before being able to submit a full application in the next available round of the fund.

The last bidding window Round 4.1 closed on 10 April 2024.

Communities will rightly be seeking clarity regarding the future of the Community Ownership Fund.

We recognise uncertainty is challenging for groups seeking to save vital community assets; the Government is carefully considering all available options and will confirm plans in due course.

■ Elections: Proof of Identity

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[19846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the introduction of voter ID on specific migrant communities.

Rushanara Ali:

As our manifesto made clear, the government will address the inconsistencies in the voter identification policy so that all legitimate electors are able to vote. We are continuing to assess and review the policy and if any further changes are found to be necessary or appropriate, we will bring forward proposals for them in due course.

■ Elections: Warwickshire

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[20505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether elections to Warwickshire County Council will take place on 1 May 2025.

Mike Martin:

[\[20555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to page 101 of the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether she plans to postpone local authority elections in Kent in 2025.

Jim McMahon:

I will consider any requests I receive to postpone the May 2025 local authority elections in Kent and Warwickshire only where this will help the areas to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe – either through the Devolution Priority Programme or where reorganisation is necessary to unlock devolution or open up new devolution options. As I set out in my letter of 16 December to those councils, I will need a clear commitment to these aims, including a request from the council(s) whose election is to be postponed, on or before Friday 10 January.

■ Homelessness: Young People

Sarah Hall:

[\[20894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how she plans to prioritise young people in the new cross-departmental strategy to end homelessness.

Sarah Hall: [\[20895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the government strategy to end homelessness will include a section on youth homelessness.

Sarah Hall: [\[20896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to prioritise ending youth homelessness.

Sarah Hall: [\[20897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what account her strategy to tackle homelessness takes of the findings of the report published by Centrepont entitled Human costs and lost potential: the real cost of youth homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This can have a devastating impact on those affected, including young people.

We must address this and deliver long term solutions. The Deputy Prime Minister is leading cross-government work to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy.

The Minister for Homelessness and Democracy has also established an Expert Group to bring together representatives from across the homelessness and rough sleeping sector, local and combined authorities and wider experts. The role of this expert group is to provide knowledge, analysis and challenge to help Government understand what is working well nationally and locally and where improvements are needed. We will continue to meet with a range of stakeholders, including mayors and MPs, to make sure the strategy is informed by a range of expertise.

As well as work on the Inter-Ministerial Group and Expert Group we are also working closely with the sector to deliver a number of lived experience forums to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are reflected in the homelessness strategy.

■ INTERREG Programme

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) her Department and (b) its agencies have had recent discussions with representatives of INTERREG on INTERREG programmes.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG officials continue to work with 2014-20 INTERREG programmes as required to support the delivery and closure of INTERREG programmes, following the terms established in the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement.

■ Mayors: Elections

Sarah Olney:

[\[20691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published 16 December 2024, whether it is her policy that mayors in Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be elected through proportional representation.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has no plans at this time to change the voting system for mayoral elections.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Alcoholic Drinks

Cat Smith:

[\[19347\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether ministers in her Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

Alex Norris:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

■ Parking: Regulation

Martin Wrigley:

[\[19896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17651 on Parking: Regulation, what options her Department is reviewing to drive up standards in the private parking industry.

Alex Norris:

As referenced in the answer to Question UIN [17651](#) on 11 December 2024, the Government is required by the Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 to publish a code of practice concerning guidance on the management of private parking facilities.

At this time the Government is not able to share any further details but hopes to announce its proposals for raising standards as soon as possible.

■ Regional Planning and Development: Finance

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 16892 on Regional Planning and Development: Finance, what her Department's policy is on the (a) Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership and (b) coordination of planning across the OxCam Arc.

Alex Norris:

At Autumn Budget, the government announced its intention to end core funding for all Pan-Regional Partnerships and consult on the impacts of this decision, if it were taken forward. This public consultation is now live and accessible on Gov.uk and Government will consider all responses received by the deadline of Monday 16 December.

The Government was clear in its manifesto that housing need in England cannot be met without planning for growth on a larger than local scale, and that it will be necessary to introduce effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning. We are committed to a universal strategic planning system to meet housing needs, deliver infrastructure, grow the economy, improve the environment and climate resilience. Legislation will be introduced in 2025, based on London's Spatial Development Strategy.

Retail Trade: Essex**James McMurdock:**[\[19925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to encourage investment in high streets in (a) Essex and (b) South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Alex Norris:

This Government is fully committed to rejuvenating our high streets and supporting the businesses and communities that make our town centres successful. This means addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, working with the banking industry to roll out 350 banking hubs, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network, reforming the apprenticeship levy, and business rates.

Furthermore, the Government is investing in local growth with local allocations for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2025-26 now announced, which places may choose to invest in rejuvenating high streets. Basildon has been allocated £419,361; and Thurrock £402,853. The Long Term Plan for Towns has funded several towns in Essex, including Canvey Island, Harlow and Clacton-on-Sea, which will also support local growth.

Shops: Greater London**Luke Taylor:**[\[19492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the number of vacant shops on high streets in London.

Alex Norris:

The government is fully committed to tackling the issue of persistent vacancy in town centres and high streets.

High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) came into effect on 2 December 2024 and are a new permissive power for local authorities in England to auction the lease of commercial high street property that has been vacant for longer than 12 months in a 24-month period.

Furthermore, through the English Devolution Bill, we will introduce a strong new 'right to buy' for valued community assets. This measure will empower local communities to reclaim and revitalise assets that are important to them such as empty shops, pubs, and community spaces, helping to improve our high streets and eliminate the blight of vacant premises.

■ **Social Rented Housing: Wolverhampton**

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge:

[\[20076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help support social housing providers to meet their duties under section 42 of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 in relation to damp and mould in Wolverhampton.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government are committed to introducing Awaab's Law to the social rented sector, setting new time limits for social landlords to fix dangerous hazards which can have a serious impact on the health of residents, including damp and mould. We are working with social housing providers and other stakeholders to determine how we best implement Awaab's Law. We will develop new guidance for landlords and residents on the new duties under the forthcoming regulations.

■ **Temporary Accommodation**

James McMurdock:

[\[19903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the support available to families living with children in temporary accommodation.

James McMurdock:

[\[19908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking with local authorities to help ensure the suitability of temporary accommodation.

James McMurdock:

[\[19910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help support the (a) mental and (b) physical health of families in temporary accommodation.

James McMurdock:

[19921]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the average length of time was that families stayed in temporary accommodation in (a) England and (b) Essex in (i) 2023 and (ii) 2024.

James McMurdock:

[19924]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of children living in temporary accommodation in (a) South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency and (b) Essex.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This government recognises the devastating impact this can have on those affected, especially children.

We must address this and deliver long term solutions. The Government is looking at these issues carefully and will develop a new cross government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending homelessness once and for all. This includes a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, bringing together ministers from across government.

All temporary accommodation must be safe and suitable in relation to the applicant and to all members of their household who normally reside with them, or who might reasonably be expected to reside with them. Chapter 17 of the homelessness code of guidance sets out the factors to be taken into account, which includes consideration for households with particular medical and/or physical needs.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-17-suitability-of-accommodation>.

Housing authorities are required to assess whether accommodation is suitable for each household individually, and case records should demonstrate that they have taken the statutory requirements into account. Housing authorities have a continuing obligation to keep the suitability of accommodation under review, and to respond to any relevant change in circumstances which may affect suitability. Applicants may ask for a review on request of the housing authority's decision that the accommodation offered to them is suitable.

A full breakdown of length of stay in temporary accommodation can be found in figure 15 of the annual statistics release for statutory homelessness assessments and activities in England, below: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2023-24/statutory-homelessness-in-england-infographic-2023-24>.

Local authorities are required to report homelessness data each quarter, including the numbers of children in temporary accommodation. The most recent figures for Q2 2024 can be accessed below using tab TA1:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024>.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Ann Davies:

[20499]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on what date she plans to publish the Shared Prosperity Fund allocations for 2025-26.

Alex Norris:

Allocations for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2025-26 were published on GOV.UK on 13 December and can be found [here](#).

JUSTICE

■ Homicide: Sentencing

Mark Swards:

[19971]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing sentences for offenders guilty of unlawful act manslaughter.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Parliament is responsible for setting the overall legal sentencing framework and the maximum penalty for unlawful act manslaughter is life imprisonment.

However, sentencing is entirely a matter for our independent courts. When deciding what sentence to impose the courts take into account the circumstances of the offence and any aggravating and mitigating factors in line with any relevant sentencing guidelines issued by the independent Sentencing Council.

■ Legal Profession: Money Laundering

Daisy Cooper:

[19781]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has received representations from the Solicitor Regulation Authority on the adequacy of the level of financial penalties for those solicitors found to be in breach of money laundering regulations.

Sarah Sackman:

The legal profession in England and Wales operates independently of government. The responsibility for regulating the sector sits with the approved regulators, overseen by the Legal Services Board.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is responsible for regulating the professional conduct of solicitors, as well as most law firms in England and Wales. The SRA's role involves protecting clients and the public, which means they have powers to issue fines and prevent solicitors in breach of their standards and regulations from practising. While the Government does not generally play a direct role in setting fining powers, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 (ECCTA) facilitated the introduction of measures to increase the SRA's fining capabilities in relation to economic crime. However, the responsibility to consult and propose new fining levels for economic crime related matters still sits with the SRA.

The LSB is currently reviewing regulators' enforcement powers as part of its wider efforts to improve the legal services sector. This review focuses on assessing whether the enforcement powers of the regulators are sufficient, effective, and proportionate. Any changes to regulator fining powers are made by an application (under s69 of the Legal Services Act 2007) from the Legal Services Board to the Lord Chancellor. The Government has not received an application for such a change.

■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Andrew Cooper:

[20382]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of appeals to the tribunals service in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England which related to (i) personal independence payments and (ii) universal credit were successful in (A) the most recent period for which figures are available and (B) each of the last five years.

Sarah Sackman:

Information about appeals to the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) (SSCS) is published at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics.

The data requested can be found under "Tribunal Statistics CSV files".

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ Written Questions: Government Responses

Mr Richard Holden:

[R] [20285]

To ask the Leader of the House, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the Government's compliance with section 9.8 of the Ministerial Code in the context of answers provided to written parliamentary questions.

Lucy Powell:

Parliament has a right to hold Ministers to account. I have written to all members of Cabinet to remind Ministers of their responsibilities to provide helpful and timely responses to Members' PQs.

As a member of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member will be aware that the Committee has a keen interest in the timeliness and quality of PQ responses, and will have seen the recent government response to the predecessor Committee's report on the 2022-23 session (available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45585/documents/225592/default/>). I look forward to working with the hon. Member and the Committee on this important matter.

As I have previously said, I encourage hon. Members to raise any specific issues they may have with myself and my office.

NORTHERN IRELAND**■ European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill****Alex Easton:**[\[20861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he received legal advice on the European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill.

Hilary Benn:

I refer the Honourable Member to the reply I provided to the question he previously tabled on this subject and published on 17 December 2024 (UIN 18801).

■ Northern Ireland Office: Media**John Cooper:**[\[20495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Hilary Benn:

The Northern Ireland Office has not incurred any spend on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Northern Ireland Office: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the Answer of 24 October 2024 to Question 9824 on Northern Ireland Office: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Hilary Benn:

The Northern Ireland Office has not spent any money on new furniture and fittings, or other refurbishment of Ministerial offices between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Electronic Government****Alex Burghart:**[\[20241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, which (a) Departments, (b) arms length bodies and (c) Government programmes have (i) migrated to and (ii) plan to migrate to One Login.

Feryal Clark:

All major government departments have committed to onboarding their services to GOV.UK One Login, and are actively developing delivery plans. They are supported by our Onboarding and Engagement team who share best practices and provide

advice and assets to enable technical service teams to onboard their services smoothly.

As of December 2024, users can access over 50 government services across multiple government Departments, within GOV.UK One Login. The list of public-facing services can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/using-your-gov-uk-one-login/services>.

Some services are still in an early testing phase and are currently available to only a select group of users, therefore not listed in the service list.

We expect to have onboard over 100 services next year, with more to follow. Future services to include those from HM Revenue and Customs, Department for Work and Pensions, Companies House, Office for Public Guardian, and the Department for Education.

■ Innovation and New Businesses: Rural Areas

Edward Morello:

[13301]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help encourage (a) innovation and (b) tech-based start-ups in rural constituencies.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT is accelerating innovation through initiatives like the Higher Education Innovation Funding, currently £280m a year, enabling universities across England to support innovative new businesses in their local areas. Additionally, through the £12.2m Digital Growth Grant, DSIT supports the Ecosystem Partnership Programme which awards funding to regional organisations delivering support in their local ecosystems. This grant also supports a cohort of AgriTech businesses as part of the Industry Bridge programme, connecting startups with corporate partners, delivered by Codebase.

■ Project Gigabit: West Worcestershire

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[18933]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent progress has been made by Building Digital UK on the roll-out of Project Gigabit in West Worcestershire; and how many additional premises will be connected to full fibre broadband in that constituency by the end of 2025.

Chris Bryant:

According to the independent website Thinkbroadband.com, 71% of premises in the West Worcestershire constituency can access a gigabit-capable broadband connection. As part of Project Gigabit, we are putting in place a contract to improve this coverage further. We plan to announce the details of this contract, including how many premises in Worcestershire will be in line to benefit, in early 2025.

Once the contract is in place, the supplier will conduct survey and planning work to determine when premises in Worcestershire will receive a gigabit-capable connection. We anticipate that build will commence in 2025 and complete by 2030.

SCOTLAND

■ Public Transport: Paisley and Renfrewshire North

Alison Taylor:

[\[20550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on improving (a) rail and (b) bus routes in Paisley and Renfrewshire North constituency.

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. Our two Governments effectively work together to deliver the Glasgow City Region Growth deal, which provides £1 billion of infrastructure funding to the region to deliver local priorities.

The planning of local and national rail and bus routes in Scotland is a devolved matter, however, and therefore the responsibility of the Scottish Government in partnership with local authorities.

■ Scotland Office: Media

John Cooper:

[\[20496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Ian Murray:

The Scotland Office has spent £5,416.25 (excluding VAT) on media training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Scotland Office: Ministers' Private Offices

Emily Thornberry:

[\[20584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Answer of 23 October 2024 to Question 9830 on Scotland Office: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Ian Murray:

The Scotland Office has incurred no costs on new furniture and fittings or other refurbishment (including moves) of Ministerial offices during the period 4 July 2022 to 4 July 2024.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY**■ Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority: Ex Gratia Payments****Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[19840\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Warrington North, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, how many employee settlement agreements there were in IPSA in each year since 2020; and what the total value of such agreements was.

Charlotte Nichols:

As with other public bodies, IPSA's Annual Report and Accounts provides information on special payments made each financial year, which can include the costs of employee settlement agreements. In line with IPSA's statutory responsibility to protect personal data, I can inform the Member that there were two such agreements made between 2020 and 2024 totalling £106,870.

■ Members: Allowances**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[19838\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Warrington North, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, if the Committee will make a comparative assessment of the value for money provided by (a) IPSA and (b) the pre-2010 system for reimbursing MPs' staffing and business costs.

Mr Peter Bedford:[\[19842\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Warrington North, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, if the Committee will make an assessment of the potential merits of commissioning an independent review of (a) IPSA's operational effectiveness and (b) the value for money provided by that organisation.

Charlotte Nichols:

The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (SCIPSA) is a statutory Committee established under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009. The Committee's functions are set out in that Act. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was also created by 2009 Act, as a statutorily independent body.

Each year the Speaker's Committee reviews IPSA's annual estimate of the resources it needs to discharge its functions. SCIPSA is required by statute to ensure that the estimate is consistent with the efficient and cost-effective discharge of IPSA's functions. The Committee carries out public scrutiny of the estimate prior to it being laid before the House of Commons by the Speaker.

IPSA's accounts are audited annually by the National Audit Office (NAO) and are presented to Parliament. The NAO audit includes consideration of value for money of both IPSA's spend and MPs' spend which IPSA oversees. IPSA is also subject to a

rigorous internal audit programme overseen by its own Audit, Risk, and Assurance Committee.

As part of its work, SCIPSA also reviews IPSA's performance against its Business Plan and has noted significant improvements in its performance in recent years. SCIPSA is planning to hold a public session with IPSA early in the new year and a further session in March 2025.

TRANSPORT

■ A14: Accidents

James Cartlidge:

[\[20683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make it her policy to review the effectiveness of National Highways' deployment of traffic officers on the A14 during serious accidents.

Lilian Greenwood:

The police manage all incidents on the A14. National Highways is informed by the police of all incidents on the A14 and provides traffic officer support for serious incidents when a unit is available to attend.

■ A226: Repairs and Maintenance

Jim Dickson:

[\[20446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what technical assistance her Department plans to provide to Kent County Council for restoring the collapsed section of the A226 Galley Hill Road at Greenhithe.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department has had a number of meetings with Kent County Council (KCC) on this matter and I visited the road in question in September. The Department is waiting for KCC to submit an analysis of the costs and benefits of different options to inform a decision on any Government support.

■ Aviation

Matt Vickers:

[\[20288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to implement her Department's policy paper entitled Future of Flight Action Plan, published on 18 March 2024.

Mike Kane:

The future aviation sector is central to delivering on the Government's missions, including kickstarting economic growth and delivering opportunities for all across the country.

My Department and I remain committed to delivering on the five future of flight strategic outcomes, which include demonstration and then routine use of drones

operating Beyond the operator's Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) at scale, and initial demonstrations of piloted electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) flights, followed by routine use and autonomous operations.

■ Bus Services

Alex Mayer:

[\[20345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle changes in average bus speeds.

Simon Lightwood:

The government is committed to working with local transport authorities and the bus sector to deliver better, more reliable services for passengers.

At the Budget, the government confirmed over £1 billion in funding to improve bus services, protect vital routes and keep fares down. This includes over £700 million allocated to local councils to deliver bus service improvement plans (BSIPs). Councils can use the funding in whichever way they wish to improve bus services for all passengers, including investing in infrastructure or bus priority schemes to help reduce journey times.

We introduced the Bus Services Bill on 17 December, which will give local leaders the powers they need and the freedom to take decisions to deliver their local transport priorities and ensure networks meet the needs of the communities who rely on them.

■ Bus Services: Disability

Dr Allison Gardner:

[\[20817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve the accessibility of bus services for disabled people in Stoke-on-Trent.

Simon Lightwood:

The government is committed to improving public transport services so they are more inclusive and enable disabled people to travel safely, confidently and with dignity. On 1st October 2024, the first phase of the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 came into force, meaning that newer vehicles providing local services must provide audible and visible information on stops, destinations and diversions. The majority of services will need to comply by October 2026.

On 17th December, the government introduced a new Bus Services Bill that will give local leaders the freedom to take decisions to deliver their local transport priorities and ensure networks meet the needs of the communities who rely on them, including for disabled people. The Bill includes measures which will make bus travel more accessible and inclusive.

■ Bus Services: ICT

Alex Mayer:

[\[20346\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data her Department holds on how many and what proportion of buses have onboard connections for electronic devices in England.

Simon Lightwood:

As of March 2024, there were 29,790 buses used by local bus operators in England. Around 28% of these buses, approximately 8,300, were equipped with charging points.

■ Buses: Exhaust Emissions

Alex Mayer:

[\[20343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding her Department provided for retrofitting buses to reduce emissions under (a) the Clean Vehicle Retrofit Accreditation Scheme and (b) other relevant schemes in 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

Since 2017, the Government allocated approximately £100m toward the retrofitting of Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) technology. The Government has not provided any funding for the retrofitting of SCR technology in 2024.

■ Cycling: Safety

Alex Easton:

[\[20384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help improve road safety for cyclists; and what financial support she has provided for programmes delivered by The Bikeability Trust since July 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

In 2022, Active Travel England was established as an executive agency to the Department for Transport, with the strategic aim of enabling people to walk, wheel and cycle and protecting them when they do by reducing road danger through the creation of safe infrastructure. The agency has been supporting the development of designs and the assessment of design quality through the use of recently published active travel design assistance and scheme review tools. Officials use these tools for ongoing design assurance and to identify critical safety issues that are associated with an increased risk of collisions for people walking, wheeling, or cycling, and work with local authorities to remove or mitigate them.

To further improve road safety for cyclists, we are investing up to £30 million this year to scale up Bikeability training to over 500,000 more children, and will announce further funding for Bikeability training in the coming months.

■ Dangerous Driving: West Midlands**Sarah Coombes:** [\[20316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many deaths were caused by illegal street racing incidents in the West Midlands in the last ten years.

Lilian Greenwood:

Statistics and data on road injury collisions and casualties reported to and recorded by police are collected via the data collection system known as STATS19. While STATS19 collects information on the collision circumstances, vehicles involved and contributory factors, it does not identify when collisions are the result of illegal street racing incidents.

■ Department for Transport: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Emily Thornberry:** [\[19660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) her core Department and (b) executive agencies of her Department at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Mike Kane:

The number of Government Procurement Cards allocated to individuals for making purchases against (a) the core Department's budget was:

(i) As of December 31, 2022: 325

(ii) As of December 31, 2023: 324

The number of Government Procurement Cards allocated to individuals for making purchases against (b) the executive agencies' budgets was:

(i) As of December 31, 2022: 304

(ii) As of December 31, 2023: 280

The Department for Transport has a clear policy for card allocation. Applications for cards must be accompanied by confirmation that budget holders approve the issue of the card within their delegated budget areas. The application confirms the Merchant Category Codes the individual is authorised to use and proposed card transaction limit and monthly limit. Card applications must include a signature to confirm that the cardholder has read and accepted departmental policies and the consequences of misuse.

■ Department for Transport: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:** [\[20185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 9281 on Department for Transport: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Mike Kane:

Between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024 the Department spent £405 on furniture for Ministerial offices. No other costs were incurred during this period.

■ Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Equality**Sir John Hayes:**[\[20131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has no staff solely dedicated to working on diversity, equality and inclusion.

■ Driving Tests**Victoria Collins:**[\[20845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of enlisting approved driving instructors to carry out practical driving tests on a temporary basis; and if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of doing so on (a) surge capacity and (b) the backlog in driving tests.

Lilian Greenwood:

It is not possible to allow approved driving instructors (ADI's) to temporarily work as driving examiners. The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) 1999 regulations require driving test examiners to meet certain criteria and pass an initial qualification and examination and prohibits a person from being an active ADI and an examiner simultaneously.

■ Euston Station: Passengers**Alex Mayer:**[\[20342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6923 on Euston Station: Passengers, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of progress in the implementation of crowd management improvements to Euston station required by the Office of Road and Rail.

Simon Lightwood:

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) closed its Improvement Notice served in respect of crowd management at Euston last year - on 15 December 2023.

As the duty holder, Network Rail is accountable for meeting health and safety and other legal responsibilities at Euston and the ORR is responsible for monitoring compliance.

The Department recognises the need for urgent improvements to passenger experience at Euston and welcomes the improvements Network Rail is making under its five-point plan announced on 4 October.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Construction

Rupert Lowe:

[19945]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate she has made of the (a) cost of building HS2 and (b) impact of HS2 on economic growth in the next 10 years; and what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the lessons learned from the construction of Crossrail.

Lilian Greenwood:

HS2 has faced increases in costs since delivery started and this needs to end and the programme must be brought under control. The Secretary of State has asked Mark Wild, the new CEO of HS2 Ltd, to review the remaining scope, the cost and schedule needed to complete phase 1 of the programme, and advise the government on what is needed.

Despite its challenges, HS2 is delivering, and will deliver long-term benefits for people and places. The programme is currently supporting over 31,700 jobs, and it will support wider economic growth, including the delivery of tens of thousands of new homes. A report commissioned by HS2, 'From Trains to Cranes', included analysis estimating that HS2 will drive a £10 billion annual uplift within the West Midlands area over the next 10 years (<https://www.hs2.org.uk/about-us/our-documents/from-trains-to-cranes-hs2-and-the-west-midlands-development-boom/>).

Action is being taken to learn lessons from Phase 1 of HS2, as well as previous programmes such as Crossrail. The Department has commissioned an independent review of the governance and assurance of the Department's major infrastructure projects, drawing primarily on the experiences of HS2. The review, which is led by James Stewart, is part of the Department's on-going programme of work to learn lessons from HS2 and its other major projects, such as Crossrail.

Greg Smith:

[20037]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of construction inflation on mitigation projects linked to the building of HS2 Phase 1.

Lilian Greenwood:

The funding provided to HS2 Ltd includes allowances for inflation based on inflation forecasts set at spending reviews. HS2 Ltd has been impacted by high levels of inflation in recent years alongside all major construction projects. However, HS2 Ltd continues to bear down on its costs to mitigate this, manage pressures within its annual budgets, and is working to reduce the impact to any mitigation projects linked to the building of Phase 1.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Costs

Greg Smith:

[20035]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate she has made of the cost of HS2 Phase 1.

Lilian Greenwood:

As reported in the [last HS2 report to Parliament](#) published in November 2023, HS2 Ltd indicated that its projected cost to deliver Phase 1 would significantly exceed the current Funding Envelope of £44.6 billion (2019 prices). Following the significant scope changes and deferrals made under the previous government, the Department is working with HS2 Ltd to review the Estimate at Completion (EAC) for HS2 Phase 1 and will report to Parliament in due course.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Worcestershire**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[20203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will publish the annual profile of the redirected HS2 funds announced for Worcestershire in October 2023.

Lilian Greenwood:

The previous Government made a series of funding promises in its Network North plan, the affordability of which this Government has had to re-examine. The Department for Transport will say more on long-term highway maintenance and other funding for Worcestershire and other places after phase 2 of the Spending Review which is due to conclude in the late spring. In the meantime, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed in the Budget on 30 October that local highway authorities would benefit from an additional £500 million for local highway maintenance in the 2025/26 financial year. This represents an increase of nearly 50% in comparison to the current financial year. Allocations to individual highway authorities will be announced shortly.

■ Maritime and Coastguard Agency: Equality**Sir John Hayes:**[\[20135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Mike Kane:

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency have 0 (zero) full-time equivalent staff employed for diversity, equality, and inclusion.

■ Merchant Shipping: Public Consultation**Peter Fortune:**[\[19550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the Consultation on the merchant shipping (vessels in commercial use for sport or pleasure) regulations 2025, published on 4 December 2024.

Peter Fortune:[\[19552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Consultation on the merchant shipping (EPIRB and PLB registration) regulations 2025, published on 5 December 2024.

Mike Kane:

The consultations on the Merchant Shipping (EPIRB and PLB Registration) Regulations 2025 and the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 2025 are published on gov.uk in a variety of formats: the main consultation documents are published as an HTML webpage which allows document readers to read for the visually impaired. The draft Regulations, Code, M-Notices and De Minimus Assessments are, by their nature, lengthy and technical documents and as a result have been published as .pdf files to preserve formatting and technical content; however, these too are capable of being read by pdf readers for the visually impaired. The response documents are published as open document format (ODF) files that can be reviewed and edited in any word processing software such as Microsoft Word or similar.

As well as publishing on gov.uk, links to the consultation documents were sent directly by email to a number of different stakeholders, industry representatives and member organisations and the devolved nations bringing this directly to their attention. This has subsequently then been shared with the wider membership of such organisations. There were also press releases from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) highlighting the launch of these public consultations, and they were shared on multiple official MCA social media channels, which were then shared further by the respective followers.

The MCA understand the importance of accessibility to public consultations such as these and take their responsibility for promulgating information very seriously. I believe the MCA have taken every step to ensure the documents shared are in an accessible format and have clearly signposted how the public can input to the consultation process.

■ Merseyrail: Nationalisation**Kim Johnson:**[\[20456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will bring forward legislation to allow the Mayor of the Liverpool City Region to appoint a public sector operator to run Merseyrail services.

Simon Lightwood:

The Mayor of the Liverpool City Region already has the power to appoint a public sector operator to run Merseyrail services. There are no plans to change this.

■ Motor Insurance: Ethnic Groups**Sarah Coombes:**[\[20311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the extra cost of car insurance premiums faced by drivers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Lilian Greenwood:

We are committed to tackling the increased costs of motor insurance to deliver on our manifesto commitment, including how this impacts different demographics, geographies, and communities.

The cross-government Motor Insurance Taskforce, including the stakeholder panel, met for the first time on 16th October. The Taskforce is currently exploring short- and long-term actions for departments that may contribute to stabilising or reducing premiums, while maintaining appropriate levels of cover.

As it takes this work forwards, the Taskforce will continue to work closely with the independent Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Competition and Markets Authority. The FCA has launched a market study into the premium finance market and is undertaking work to analyse the cause of increased claims costs in the motor insurance market.

Motor Vehicles: Registration**Greg Smith:**[\[20033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with the DVLA on the call for evidence entitled Registering historic, classic, rebuilt vehicles and vehicles converted to electric: call for evidence, updated on 9 December 2024.

Lilian Greenwood:

The summary of the responses to the call for evidence was published on 9 December.

As part of the ongoing engagement regarding this matter, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency held a positive meeting with representatives of the Historic Vehicle User Group on 12 December, in which the DVLA updated the Group on potential next steps in reviewing the policies in this area.

Tom Morrison:[\[20905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of charging foreign-registered vehicles to use UK roads.

Lilian Greenwood:

Foreign-registered heavy goods vehicles (HGV) are already charged to use UK roads through the HGV Levy. This is in recognition of the fact that HGVs can cause greater damage to road surfaces than other vehicle types. There are no plans to implement a general road charge for foreign-registered cars, which make up only 0.14% of car traffic on British roads.

Motor Vehicles: Theft**Andrew Griffith:**[\[20442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many thefts of motor vehicles from railway station car parks there were in each of the last five years; and how many of those thefts resulted in a criminal prosecution.

Simon Lightwood:

According to British Transport Police (BTP) data, there have been 1,853 thefts of motor vehicles from rail station car parks between January 2020 and up to and including the 2nd December 2024. Of these, 69 resulted in criminal prosecution.

YEAR	BTP RECORDED NUMBER OF THEFT OF MOTOR VEHICLE OFFENCES	RECORDED CRIME THAT LED TO PROSECUTION AT COURT (CORRECT AS OF 03/12/2024)
2020	215	20
2021	192	7
2022	482	25
2023	483	11
2024 (up to 02/12/2024 only)	481	6

During 2020 and 2021 passenger numbers were reduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so train station car parks were also likely less occupied during this time.

Andrew Griffith: [\[20447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many thefts of motor vehicles there were from the railway station car parks at (a) Arundel, (b) Amberley, (c) Barnham, (d) Haslemere, (e) Liphook, (f) Pulborough and (g) Billingshurst in each of the last five years; and how many of these resulted in a criminal prosecution.

Simon Lightwood:

According to British Transport Police (BTP) data there have been 45 thefts of motor vehicle offences at the 7 named stations between January 2020 and up to and including the 2nd December 2024. Of these currently 2 have resulted in criminal prosecution.

Number of thefts

YEAR					
Location	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (up to 02/12/2024 only)
Arundel Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Amberley Railway Station	0	0	0	1	1

YEAR

Barnham Railway Station	0	0	0	1	1
Billingshurst Railway Station	1	0	0	0	0
Haslemere Railway Station	1	3	10	8	3
Liphook Railway Station	0	0	2	1	0
Pulborough Railway Station	2	0	1	3	6

Number of prosecutions (note possible time lag for more recent thefts)

YEAR

Location	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (up to 02/12/2024 only)
Arundel Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Amberley Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Barnham Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Billingshurst Railway Station	1	0	0	0	0

YEAR

Haslemere Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Liphook Railway Station	0	0	0	0	0
Pulborough Railway Station	1	0	0	0	0

During 2020 and 2021 passenger numbers were reduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so train station car parks were also likely less occupied during this time.

■ Motorcycles: Driving Licences

Sammy Wilson: [\[20590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 September 2024 to Question 4347 on Motorcycles: Driving Licences, whether the Motorcycle Strategic Focus Group met in autumn 2024.

Sammy Wilson: [\[20591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 September 2024 to Question 4347 on Motorcycles: Driving Licences, when the Motorcycle Strategic Focus Group is next scheduled to meet; and whether that meeting will discuss user licensing reform.

Lilian Greenwood:

The planned meeting of The Motorcycle Strategic Focus Group for autumn 2024 has now been rescheduled for 20 January 2025. The Government is considering plans to review existing requirements for motorcycle training, testing and licensing, taking account of long-standing Department for Transport and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency plans and recent sector proposals.

Sammy Wilson: [\[20594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of the licensing regime proposed in the report entitled A licence to net zero, published by the Motorcycle Industry Association in October 2023.

Sammy Wilson: [\[20595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of simplifying the licensing process for (a) mopeds, (b) motorcycles and (c) other powered light vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department for Transport has received additional evidence from the Motorcycle Industry Association on the road safety considerations for the proposals set out in their report 'A Licence to Net Zero', which proposed changes to the existing licensing regime for mopeds, motorcycles and light powered vehicles. Officials are currently analysing this.

Motorcycles: Safety**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[20256\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with representatives of the motorcycle sector on improving safety of motorcyclists on the road.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes road safety seriously, and we are committed to reducing the numbers of those killed and injured on our roads, including motorcyclists who are overrepresented in casualty statistics. A representative of the motorcycling sector attended a Ministerial roundtable on 7 October to discuss road safety and motorcycle stakeholders also have regular meetings with officials from the Department.

Motorcycles: Sales**Sammy Wilson:**[\[20593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with her (a) European and (b) international counterparts on end of sales dates for new non zero emission powered light vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Secretary of State has not yet had any discussions with international counterparts on end of sales dates for new non-zero emission powered light vehicles. We remain committed to decarbonising transport, including powered light vehicles, as we shift to zero emission mobility.

Passenger Transport Executives**Alex Mayer:**[\[20344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will publish guidance on the process for establishing passenger transport executives.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department has no current plans to publish guidance on establishing a new Passenger Transport Executive. Setting up a new Passenger Transport Executive to coordinate local transport in its area would require amendments to legislation. Local and Combined Authorities already have a number of coordinating powers and functions in relation to transport. The English Devolution White Paper (December 2024) set out Government's plans to provide additional transport powers and responsibilities to Local and Combined Authorities.

■ Railways: Accidents

Lewis Cocking: [\[19800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many train collisions with people have been reported in each train operating company's network area in the last 12 months; and how many people were involved in such collisions in each area.

Simon Lightwood:
The number of people struck by trains in the last 12 months within each of Network Rail's regions and routes is set out below. This data shows whether the incident led to a fatality or injury, and if it was classified as a suspected suicide or as non-suicidal. The total number of people struck by trains over this period was 339.

NR REGION	FATALITIES	INJURIES		
	Suicidal	Non-suicidal	Suicidal	Non-suicidal
Eastern	98	1	11	9
North West and Central	63	3	11	8
Scotland's Railway	16	0	2	1
Southern	47	1	3	6
Wales and Western	50	2	1	6

NR ROUTE	FATALITIES	INJURIES		
	Suicidal	Non-suicidal	Suicidal	Non-suicidal
Anglia	29	1	4	1
East Coast	20	0	2	4
East Midlands	18	0	3	4
North & East	31	0	2	0
Central	18	0	5	2
North West	35	3	5	5
West Coast Mainline South	10	0	1	1

NR ROUTE	FATALITIES	INJURIES		
Scotland's Railway	16	0	2	1
Kent	12	0	1	3
Sussex	16	0	2	1
Wessex	19	1	0	2
Wales and Borders	11	1	1	2
Western	39	1	0	4

■ Railways: Dawlish

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the timing of the funding for phase five of the Dawlish Rail Resilience Programme on the cost of phase four of that programme; and whether she plans to seek additional funding through the spending review for those costs.

Simon Lightwood:

Decisions in relation to a phase five of the South West Rail Resilience Programme do not impact the cost of phase four, for which all physical works have now been completed.

Phase five is being considered as part of the Spending Review in 2025.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what criteria her Department is using to assess the viability of the fifth phase of the Rail Resilience Programme for Dawlish.

Simon Lightwood:

Proposals for a fifth phase of the South West Rail Resilience Programme will be assessed against the criteria described in the document entitled 'Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline - A New Approach for Rail Enhancements' published in March 2018.

■ Railways: Employers' Contributions

Gareth Bacon:

[\[19812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 18188 on Railways: Employers' Contributions, whether she plans to increase regular contract payments in line with the cost of changes to employer National Insurance contributions made at the Autumn Budget 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

Regular contract payments will take account of the increase in the cost of changes to employer National Insurance contributions made at the Autumn Budget 2024.

■ **Railways: Wythall****Bradley Thomas:**[\[19866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to improve the (a) frequency and (b) reliability of rail services between Wythall and Birmingham.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department works with West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) to ensure that West Midlands Trains (WMT) are focused on tackling the issues of frequency and reliability of all services, including between Wythall and Birmingham. Initiatives includes improving WMT's operating processes/procedures, recruiting additional traincrew and also working with Network Rail to improve infrastructure resilience.

■ **Roads: South East****Dr Al Pinkerton:**[\[20772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to enhance strategic road networks before the development of new housing projects in the South East.

Lilian Greenwood:

National Highways play a key role in the planning process to determine the necessary strategic road requirements of new major housing projects, and new major developments are a key consideration in future network investment planning as part of the Road Investment Strategy. Alongside this, the Department continues to work with colleagues in the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government and other partners to deliver a well-designed, integrated, and affordable transport network that unlocks homes and supports new developments. This is key to realising wider growth benefits, including reducing congestion and emissions, and ensuring communities can access jobs and services.

■ **Seafarers' Charter: Shipping****Andrew Rosindell:**[\[20157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to make the signing of the seafarers charter by maritime operators compulsory.

Mike Kane:

The Government is committed to strengthening workers' rights at sea, and has tabled an amendment to the Employment Rights Bill to give Ministers powers to create a legally-binding Seafarers' Charter that will protect and improve seafarer working conditions.

■ Shipping: Carbon Emissions

Gareth Bacon:

[\[19816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to publish her Department's plans to decarbonise (a) shipping and (b) the wider maritime sector.

Mike Kane:

Maritime has a key role to play in supporting the Government's missions, from clean energy, to growth, and supporting public health through tackling air pollution. We will shortly set out our next steps for reducing the emissions from both shipping and the wider maritime sector in a forthcoming maritime decarbonisation plan, which will include a package of policy and regulatory measures.

■ Shipping: Ports and Territorial Waters

Dr Andrew Murrison:

[\[19266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure that (a) unregistered and (b) uninsured vessels do not (i) enter UK territorial waters and (ii) dock at UK ports.

Mike Kane:

As a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UK (or any state that has subscribed to the agreement) cannot disrupt the transit passage of vessels through its territorial waters for lacking insurance, or being unregistered, as this is not considered to fall within any of the exceptions to passage being 'innocent passage'.

Refusal to allow a vessel to dock into a UK port is a decision for the port. Vessels docked at a UK port may be subject to a Port State Control inspection. Registration and insurance are part of the documentation that is checked.

■ Shipping: Training

Gareth Bacon:

[\[19817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to provide funding for support for maritime training beyond March 2025.

Mike Kane:

Funding for the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme will be determined as part of the ongoing departmental business planning process for the financial year 2025/26. We will share more when we are able to do so.

■ Taxis

Mr Louie French:

[\[20474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of recent trends in the level of black cab numbers on (a) the elderly and (b) people with visual impairments or mobility issues.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government understands the importance of accessible taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs) in supporting older and disabled people to live independent lives. All taxis in London and several other large cities in England are wheelchair accessible and we recognise the potential negative effect the decline in their number may have on the overall accessibility of taxi and PHV services in areas affected.

Ultimately, the licensing of taxis and PHVs is a matter for local licensing authorities (LLAs) and the Government expects them to anticipate the needs of people in their area proactively, and to ensure that services meet a wide range of passenger needs. In doing so, LLAs are encouraged to follow the government's Best Practice Guidance on Taxi and PHV Licensing and to be mindful of their broader duties under the Equality Act 2010.

■ Taxis: Conditions of Employment**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[20023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the measures in the Employments Rights Bill on working rights for private hire drivers.

Simon Lightwood:

The Employment Rights Bill Impact Assessments show that by boosting protections and the quality of work for the lowest paid in the labour market, who are concentrated in more deprived areas of the UK, the package will help to raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all.

Private hire drivers' entitlements to employment rights depend, as with other working individuals, on their employment status. The Employment Rights Bill does provide important new rights for many limb (b) workers – in particular the measures relating to zero hours contracts.

■ Tonnage Tax: Registration**Karl Turner:**[\[20196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the number of (a) company groups that have been entered into the Tonnage Tax scheme and (b) vessels entered into the scheme by those company groups in each year since 2000; and what flags of registration those companies flew.

Mike Kane:

The Department does not maintain cumulative records of all companies that have participated in the Tonnage Tax system, as there is no business requirement to do so. The training obligation is assessed annually. However, we can provide the most recent figures as of 1 October 2024.

Currently, there are 82 companies participating in the Tonnage Tax scheme, encompassing 870 ships, 331 of which are UK-flagged. Additionally, 35 companies are recorded as having exited the scheme.

Excluding the 331 ships registered in the UK, other ships in the scheme are registered under the following flags:

- Cyprus: 6
- Denmark: 16
- Finland: 3
- Italy: 1
- Malta: 43
- Netherlands: 2
- Norway: 9
- Portugal: 6
- Spain: 1
- Antigua and Barbuda: 6
- Bahamas: 99
- Bermuda: 8
- Brazil: 3
- Cayman Islands: 1
- Gibraltar: 8
- Hong Kong: 16
- Isle of Man: 44
- Liberia: 161
- Madeira: 10
- Marshall Islands: 49
- Panama: 30
- St. Vincent: 1
- Singapore: 15
- USA: 1

■ Unmanned Air Vehicles

Matt Vickers:

[20287]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will take steps to encourage the use of drone technology.

Mike Kane:

This government's strategic vision is to maximise benefits of drone technology – for the economy and for communities – whilst ensuring their emergence is both safe and secure, and respecting the needs of local communities across the country.

TREASURY■ **Cancer: Medical Treatments****Daisy Cooper:**[\[19780\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the private medical insurance industry's coverage of treatment for patients with rare cancers.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is an independent body responsible for regulating and supervising the conduct of the financial services industry, including firms that provide private medical insurance.

The Government is determined that all insurers should treat consumers fairly and provide products that offer fair value, and firms are required to do so under FCA rules. Fair value means that the price a consumer pays for a product or service must be reasonable compared to the overall benefits they can expect to receive. The FCA has robust powers to act against firms that fail to comply with its rules.

Consumers who do not feel they have been treated fairly may be able to refer the matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service, an independent body set up to provide arbitration in such cases.

■ **Civil Society: Employers' Contributions****Colum Eastwood:**[\[20305\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had discussions with the Minister for Finance in Northern Ireland on the potential impact of increases in employers' National Insurance contributions on community and voluntary sector organisations in Northern Ireland.

Darren Jones:

In order to repair the public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the UK Government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance contributions (NICs).

The UK Government recognises the need to protect charities, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of employers with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year.

In addition, charities will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible.

The devolved governments will receive funding through the Barnett Formula in 2025-26 for any changes to UK Government department budgets, including support for employer NICs. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

This funding will be in addition to the devolved governments' record Spending Review settlements for 2025-26, which are the largest in real terms of any settlements since devolution.

I regularly engage with the Minister of Finance for Northern Ireland on a variety of issues, including the impact of Autumn Budget 2024 in Northern Ireland.

■ Companies: Registration

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[19220\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the implications for her policies of reports that Chinese companies have registered more than 30,000 companies at UK addresses where the registered owners have no connection to the business concerned.

Tulip Siddiq:

DBT and Companies House are moving at pace to implement the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2024, a principal purpose of which is to strengthen the powers of the Registrar of Companies to bear down on the abuse of corporate structures in the UK. Enhanced intelligence sharing between public authorities is a key element in that.

HMRC is aware of the risk of overseas sellers misrepresenting their true establishment to an online marketplace so that the online marketplace will not charge VAT, and continues to keep the policy under review. Rules introduced in January 2021 make Online Marketplaces responsible for VAT on goods sold by overseas businesses on their platforms.

■ Cryptocurrencies

John Glen:

[\[19277\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the ban on retail derivatives for crypto.

Tulip Siddiq:

Whether to allow the sale of cryptoasset derivatives to retail consumers is a matter for the independent Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The FCA has stated that it considers these products to be ill-suited for retail consumers because they cannot be reliably valued and therefore risk posing harm.

The Government has confirmed its intention to proceed with creating a financial services regulatory regime for cryptoassets. Once in place, this regime will help ensure appropriate protections for customers wishing to invest in cryptoassets, and associated products.

■ Financial Services Compensation Scheme

Mr Peter Bedford:

[20289]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the Protected Savings threshold from £85,000.

Tulip Siddiq:

Deposits held by UK banks, building societies and credit unions that are authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) up to £85,000, with joint accounts protected up to £170,000.

The PRA sets this limit and is required to review it every five years, with its next review due by 2025 at the latest. Any changes to the limit must be approved by HM Treasury and the government would expect to carefully consider any potential changes proposed by the PRA.

■ Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[19221]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to place on a statutory footing the ability to redirect a portion of funds recovered from sanctions violations penalties to provide reparations for survivors of (a) human rights and (b) humanitarian law violations.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) is responsible for issuing civil monetary penalties for breaches of financial sanctions. OFSI maintains a robust and effective toolkit for responding to breaches of financial sanctions, of which monetary penalties remain a key component. Monetary penalties are not always the most appropriate enforcement outcome. Many cases are resolved privately through warning letters, other advice to firms or referrals to regulators.

The money collected from monetary penalties is deposited into the Consolidated Fund, in line with the general principles applying to the treatment of fines or other penalties imposed by public bodies in central government. OFSI currently has no plans to change this system.

■ Innovation: Finance

Chi Onwurah:

[19687]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, and his Department's press release entitled Pat McFadden vows to make the state more like a start up as he deploys reform teams across country, published on 9 December 2024, which Department's budget allocation the £100m Innovation Fund will be drawn from.

Darren Jones:

I refer the hon Friend to the answer given to Question UIN 11936 on 8 November 2024.

The Public Sector Reform and Innovation Fund allocates £165 million to a range of projects in 2025-26, including support for foster care, delivering apprenticeships and planning reforms.

Partnering with Mayors and local leaders, the Autumn Budget 2024 allocated a further £100 million over the next three years to public service reform with a focus on experimentation and learning. This will complement and inform ongoing reform programmes being delivered by departments. The Government will announce more details on this in due course.

■ Mandatory Provident Fund: British National (Overseas)**Blair McDougall:**[\[19486\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will issue guidance to (a) HSBC and (b) Standard Chartered on the validity of British National (Overseas) passports for Hong Kongers to use to secure early withdrawals of their Mandatory Provident Fund savings after permanently leaving Hong Kong.

Tulip Siddiq:

This government is deeply committed to supporting members of the Hong Kong community who have relocated to the UK. We are aware that individuals who have chosen to take up the British National (Overseas) route are having difficulties accessing their Mandatory Provident Fund from Hong Kong.

Whilst documentary requirements for withdrawing funds are a matter for the Hong Kong authorities, officials have raised this issue directly with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Hong Kong MPF Schemes Authority. We have urged them to facilitate early draw down of funds as is the case for other Hong Kong residents who move overseas permanently and have made clear such discrimination of BN(O)s is unacceptable.

■ Mortgages**Chris Evans:**[\[19675\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the recommendations of the report entitled *Releasing Mortgage Prisoners: proposed solutions and illustrative costings*, published by the LSE in February 2023; and whether she plans to implement those recommendations.

Tulip Siddiq:

This Government understands the challenges that mortgage prisoners face and will work with regulators and the industry to ensure that this issue is properly considered, including looking at the recommendations of the 2023 LSE report.

There are significant measures in place to protect vulnerable mortgage borrowers across the mortgage market, including mortgage prisoners. Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules require lenders to engage individually with their customers who are struggling or who are worried about their payments in order to provide tailored support. Closed book lenders must also comply with the FCA's Consumer Duty, which ensures firms prioritise fair treatment and good outcomes for their customers.

Additionally, the Government has a number of measures in place to help people to avoid repossession, including Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) loans for those in receipt of an income-related benefit; the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS); and protection in the courts through the Pre-Action Protocol, which makes it clear that repossession must always be the last resort for lenders.

■ Nurseries: Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake: [19709]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the average Rateable Value is of a pre-school nursery.

Kevin Hollinrake: [19710]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the average Rateable Value is of an independent school.

James Murray:

The Valuation Office Agency publishes this data as part of its official statistics on the stock of non-domestic properties: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/non-domestic-rating-stock-of-properties-2024

The mean rateable values for pre-school nurseries and independent schools in England and Wales are published on rows 254, 257 and 259, under column E in the [Stock SCat, 2024 spreadsheet](#).

Please note, figures show the mean rateable value in thousands of pounds.

■ Offshore Industry: Finance

Ellie Chowns: [19177]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to (a) end funding for the Ring Fence Expenditure Supplement for oil and gas companies and (b) redirect any savings to international climate finance.

James Murray:

Ring Fence Expenditure Supplement (RFES) maintains the time value of oil and gas exploration, appraisal and development costs. This recognises that oil and gas projects have high costs before production begins, but no production income to set these costs against. By maintaining the time value of these costs when they are used against production income in future years, RFES supports investment in the sector by ensuring companies receive an appropriate deduction for their expenditure. The

government currently has no plans to change this aspect of the tax system, but keeps all of its taxes under review as a matter of course.

This Government is engaged in international discussions regarding ways to mobilise finance at the scale needed to respond to the climate crisis. This includes mobilising funding from non-traditional donors, the private sector, philanthropies and through innovative financing.

■ Private Education: VAT

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[19808]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 3666 on Private Education: VAT, what steps she plans to take to monitor the impact of the policy changes on military families.

James Murray:

HMRC routinely monitors the impact of policy changes. The measure to remove the VAT exemption for education and boarding services provided by private schools will be kept under review through communication with affected stakeholder groups and stakeholders as well as education departments across the devolved governments.

The government greatly values the contribution of diplomatic staff and serving personnel and provides the Continuity of Education allowance (CEA) to ensure that the need for frequent mobility does not interfere with the education of their children.

As the government set out in its Summary of Responses to the Technical Note on Applying VAT to Private School Fees, the MoD has increased the funding allocated to the CEA to account for the impact of any private school fee increases on the proportion of fees covered by the CEA, in line with how the allowance normally operates.

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) has been published which gives a clear explanation of the policy objective together with comprehensive assessment of the impacts on the Exchequer, individuals and families, businesses and the wider economy, equalities impacts, and any other specific area of impact. The TIIN can be found here: [Applying VAT to private school fees - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2024-25-private-school-fees).

■ Property: Valuation

Nick Timothy:

[19891]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will have discussions with representatives from the banking sector on the adequacy of property valuations for mortgage applications.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government is regularly in contact with mortgage lenders on all aspects of their business, including the mortgage application process.

The specific details of how property valuations are carried out for mortgage applications is a commercial decision for lenders in which the Government does not intervene.

■ Public Sector: Collective Bargaining

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19626\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to replace the public sector pay review bodies with collective bargaining.

Darren Jones:

The PRB process is the established mechanism for determining pay uplifts for many workforces in the public sector. It has operated for over four decades, provides independent advice and is a neutral process in which all parties play a role – and which unions campaigned to establish in the first place. The Chancellor is committed to this process but recognises that confidence in the process has fallen in recent years. The Government is committed to restoring this confidence

That is why the Government took the decision to launch the 2025/26 pay round in September 2024 - three months earlier than last year. This will mean public sector workers get their pay awards closer to the start of the financial year, putting us on track to restore the process to its proper timetable by 2026/27.

■ Research: Finance

Liam Byrne:

[\[20147\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the planned £20.4 billion of research and development spending on (a) economic growth, (b) the national investment rate and (c) crowding in of private investment.

Darren Jones:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the government protected R&D by allocating £20.4bn to support its missions, including the growth mission. Recent Department for Science, Innovation and Technology published research has found an average rate of return to public R&D of 40% after 6 years from when the investment is made [\[1\]](#). The government's investment will also boost business investment in R&D. Although estimates of the impact on private investment vary, on average £1 of public R&D investment leverages around £2 of private R&D investment in the long run [\[2\]](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility is responsible for modelling the impact of government policy on the economy.

[\[1\] Returns to Public Research and Development - GOV.UK](#)

[\[2\] Research and development: relationship between public and private funding - GOV.UK](#)

■ Social Services: Finance

Helen Maguire:

[\[20115\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential (a) social and (b) economic impact of increasing investment in preventative upstream services such as youth work.

Darren Jones:

The Prime Minister has set out the Plan for Change for this government, with early intervention at the centre of the government's priorities, including giving children the best start in life, putting police back on the beat, and ending hospital backlogs.

The Chancellor also set out that prevention would be a key theme of the Spending Review. HMT will work with departments to develop proposals on prevention, including their social and economic impact, through phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Tax Avoidance

Christine Jardine:

[\[19752\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the independent review into the loan charge will include consideration of the issuing of section 684 notices prior to 2011.

James Murray:

At Budget, the Government committed to an independent review of the Loan Charge to help bring the matter to a close for those affected whilst ensuring fairness for all taxpayers.

Further details will be set out in due course.

■ Treasury: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry:

[\[19665\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) HM Treasury and (b) HMRC at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

James Murray:

Procurement cards assist with the reduction in procurement bureaucracy, boost efficiency and support the Government's prompt payment initiative for Small and Medium businesses.

Controls are in place that limit purchase types and values in line with individual departmental controls.

The number of procurement cards held by HM Treasury staff were

(i) 68 at the end of 2022

(ii) 68 at the end of 2023

The number of procurement cards held by HMRC Staff were

(i) 161 at the end of 2022

(ii) 159 at the end of 2023.

■ **UK Infrastructure Bank: Women**

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[20240\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what proportion of funding from the UK Infrastructure Bank went to female-led (a) projects and (b) businesses in the last 10 years.

Darren Jones:

The National Wealth Fund does not record the gender of the leadership teams of the projects and businesses, in which it invests. The National Wealth Fund makes investment decisions in line with its investment principles, which can be found on its website. The UK Infrastructure Bank operated from 2021-24.

WALES

■ **Wales Office: Ministers' Private Offices**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[20585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the Answer of 21 October 2024 to Question 9284 on Wales Office: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Dame Nia Griffith:

The Department spent £4,277.25 on refurbishment of Ministers Offices between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024. The spend was on:

£286.76 - replacement of two blind cords with plastic cords;

£3,990.49 - re-upholstering of five leather chairs in the London Office.

The spend was under the previous administration.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ **Carers: Conditions of Employment**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19621\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to make caring a protected characteristic in employment law.

Anneliese Dodds:

Carers are likely to be already protected from less favourable treatment under the Equality Act 2010, in relation to the protected characteristics of age and disability under the "discrimination by association" provisions. These provisions require employers to treat employees with caring responsibilities fairly and to not directly discriminate against them because they are looking after a young, old or disabled

relative. It is ultimately for courts and tribunals to determine the protection applicable in a particular case. There are currently no plans to make caring a specific protected characteristic.

Helping carers is an important part of our plans to modernise the world of work, ensuring they can enjoy a good job and contribute their skills alongside their valuable role as carers. The government is giving carers greater flexibility to work and increase their financial security by raising the Carer's Allowance Weekly Earnings Limit by £45 per week. This will be the largest increase to the earnings limit since Carer's Allowance was introduced in 1976.

■ Discrimination

Nadia Whittome:

[\[20047\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of time limits to bring discrimination cases under the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

The time limit to bring discrimination cases to a tribunal is being extended from 3 to 6 months through the Employment Rights Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament. This measure will allow certain claims to be made that currently are either (a) being made but which require, at the tribunal's discretion, an extension over the 3-month period or (b) not being made as a result of the length of the time limit.

This supports the Government's commitment to making work pay by strengthening employment rights and providing quicker and more effective resolutions, to the benefit of all parties. The change will align the timelines across different cases, simplifying the process for applicants and employers.

■ Discrimination: Social Media

Jo White:

[\[901928\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps the Government is taking to help tackle misogyny on social media platforms.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Online Safety Act requires services to protect all users from illegal misogynistic content, and children from harmful misogynistic content including content which is violent, hateful or abusive.

The largest services (category 1) will also need to remove misogynistic content prohibited in their terms of service and have effective, accessible mechanisms to report abuse.

■ Paternity Leave

Olly Glover:

[\[901935\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the length of paternity leave taken by men on women.

Anneliese Dodds:

It is really important that parents are able to spend sufficient time with their children without it negatively affecting their careers.

The Parental Rights Survey found that 70% of employee fathers took Paternity Leave.

More work needs to be done to support working parents, and we have committed to a review of the parental leave system. Work is underway planning its delivery.

The Employment Rights Bill will make Parental and Paternity Leave 'day one' rights, bringing 1.5 million parents into scope for Parental Leave, and 32,300 into scope for Paternity Leave.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carers: Employment

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will commission specialist support for carers who have not been in paid employment for some time on (a) managing finances, (b) work placements and (c) confidence building.

Alison McGovern:

As we have promised in the recently published Get Britain Working White Paper, this government will be providing help more effectively by creating a new jobs and careers service to help people into work and get on at work, which will promote better joining up employment support.

This will build on what the Department for Work and Pensions already offer to support carers. Part time carers on Universal Credit receive tailored support from their Jobcentre Plus work coach, who will adjust work related requirements to fit around their caring responsibilities. Support also includes skills training, career advice, job search help, volunteering opportunities and access to the Flexible Support Fund to aid job entry.

Full time carers providing at least 35 hours caring per week, are not required to undertake any work-related activities, but they can access employment support voluntarily.

Additionally, the department launched the Jobhelp pages offering advice to help carers make informed decisions about combining work and caring responsibilities.

■ Child Maintenance Service

Graeme Downie: [\[20449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the formula used by the Child Maintenance Service to calculate the Flat Rate of child maintenance was last reviewed.

Graeme Downie: [\[20450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to review the formula used by the Child Maintenance Service to calculate the Flat Rate of child maintenance.

Graeme Downie: [\[20451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the Flat Rate of Child Maintenance awarded by the Child Maintenance Service.

Graeme Downie: [\[20452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to ensure the Flat Rate of Child Maintenance reflects changes in the cost of living.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service believes that both parents have a financial responsibility to contribute towards the cost of bringing up their child, regardless of their financial situation.

The level of flat rate maintenance for non-resident parents was last reviewed in 2012 as part of the Child Maintenance Calculation Regulations. The government has committed to reviewing the calculation to make sure it is fit for purpose and reflects today's trends. Any changes will be subject to consultation and legislation brought forward where necessary for approval.

Non-resident parents receiving benefits (including Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit without earnings) or who have gross weekly income between £7 and £100 are required to pay the flat rate of £7 a week. This rate ensures that parents meet their financial responsibility in paying towards their children's upbringing while protecting the welfare of the paying parent to maximise the likelihood of regular payments being made.

■ Children: Maintenance

Jim Shannon: [\[20210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Gingerbread report entitled Fix the Child Maintenance Service, published on 25 November 2024, what assessment she has made of the impact of non-receipt of child maintenance on child poverty levels.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) is committed to encouraging parents to meet their responsibilities to provide their children with the financial support they need to get a good start in life. Child Maintenance payments from both CMS and family-based arrangements keep 160,000 children out of poverty each year. The CMS has a low percentage of unpaid maintenance. 8% of the total maintenance due to be paid since the CMS began remains to be collected.

The CMS has recently consulted on significant reforms and responses are being analysed. Proposals included removing the Direct Pay service and managing all CMS cases in one service to allow the CMS to tackle non-compliance faster. The Government will publish a response in due course.

The CMS continues to engage regularly with stakeholders, including Gingerbread, as we consider reform.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Buildings**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[19970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 13145 on DWP: Buildings, how many staff were in attendance in Caxton House on average in the last week for which figures are available.

Andrew Western:

We have the data that you have requested for week commencing 2nd December 2024 (02/12/24 – 06/12/24).

The average attendance per day for Caxton House this week is 623.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 23 October 2024 to Question 9288 on Department for Work and Pensions: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Andrew Western:

There was nil spend in relation to the Ministers' Private Offices, on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024.

■ Employment: Disability**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[19873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to help disabled people into work.

Alison McGovern:

Backed by £240m investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will drive forward approaches to tackling economic inactivity and work toward the long-term ambition of an 80% employment rate.

Appropriate work is generally good for health and wellbeing, so we want everyone to get work and get on in work, whoever they are and wherever they live. We want people to avoid poverty, and for this to happen we must ensure that disabled people and people with health conditions have the opportunity to work and save for as long as they wish and are able to.

Disabled people and people with health conditions are a diverse group so access to the right work and health support, in the right place, at the right time, is key. We therefore have a range of specialist initiatives to support individuals to stay in work and get back into work, including those that join up employment and health systems.

Measures include support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres and Access to Work grants, 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, Support with Employee Health and Disability service [a digital information service for employers](#) and the Disability Confident scheme.

■ Employment: Young People**Steve Darling:****[19484]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to help young universal credit claimants into work.

Alison McGovern:

Our plan to go further, as laid out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, is critical to growing the economy. This includes implementing a new national jobs and career service to help get more people into work alongside a Youth Guarantee, meaning more quality opportunities for training, an apprenticeship or help to find work for all young people aged 18-21 years old, to prevent them becoming excluded from the world of work at a young age.

The Department understands the negative effects of unemployment can be particularly pronounced for young people and can have longstanding implications on their future earnings potential and life chances. This is why the Department for Work and Pensions has a particular focus on ensuring young people are supported into employment, whilst also recognising their needs will vary depending on where they live and their own individual circumstances.

The Department for Work and Pensions currently provides young people aged 16-24 with labour market support through an extensive range of interventions at a national and local level. This includes flexible provision driven by local need, nationwide employment programmes and support delivered by work coaches based in our Jobcentres and in local communities working alongside partners.

■ Financial Services: Education

Helen Maguire:

[\[20330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to (a) improve the financial educational resources and tools available for adults who are no longer in formal education and (b) increase awareness of the resources currently available.

Andrew Western:

Given the current cost of living it is essential for individuals to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage their finances. DWP invests in upskilling their staff to increase their confidence in guiding customers through conversations about enhancing their financial skills and understanding the advantages of doing so.

DWP supports customers to improve their financial skills by signposting them to MoneyHelper in order to help them make better financial choices. MoneyHelper operates across the UK, however, as financial skills is a devolved matter, additional support is available in Scotland and Wales.

DWP is consistently striving to enhance the services provided to our customers, ensuring they receive the most effective guidance by directing them to bodies that can assist in improving their financial skills.

■ Jobcentres: Assistive Technology

Richard Burgon:

[\[19367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to ensure that disabled jobseekers can access the assistive technology they need to look for work.

Alison McGovern:

As part of our reforms to jobcentres outlined in the Get Britain Working White Paper, we will explore how we can use assistive digital technology and modern premises design to support greater accessibility and inclusiveness. We will also ensure we offer a range of channels to meet people's differing needs, whether online, on the phone or in person.

■ Older People: Poplar and Limehouse

Apsana Begum:

[\[20267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help tackle poverty in older people in Poplar and Limehouse constituency in the context of changes to the eligibility criteria for the winter fuel payment.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is honouring our commitment to the Triple Lock with a 4.1% increase to the basic State Pension and the new State Pension; and we are also increasing the standard minimum guarantee in Pension Credit by 4.1%. As such, according to the latest OBR projections, the full yearly rate of the new State Pension is forecast to increase by around £1,900 over the course of this parliament whilst the full yearly amount of the basic State Pension is forecast to increase by around £1,500.

The Government also offers an array of support to ensure pensioners remain comfortable and safe in the winter months. This includes direct financial help to low-income pensioners through Pension Credit, Cold Weather Payments and the Warm Home Discount (in England & Wales).

We know there are low-income pensioners who aren't claiming Pension Credit. We want to ensure as many people as possible have access to this support and urge pensioners to check their eligibility. Pension Credit will passport them to receive Winter Fuel Payments in future, alongside other benefits – hundreds of pounds that could really help them. Our take-up campaign has been successful in boosting applications by 145% since July.

The Warm Home Discount scheme provides eligible low-income households across Great Britain with a £150 rebate on their winter energy bill. This winter, we expect over 3 million households, including over 1 million pensioners, to benefit under the scheme.

The Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500 million Winter Support Commitment for customers, which will help customers most in need by providing credit on bills, enhanced debt write-off schemes, and increased funding for charity partners to target hard to reach customers.

Low-income pensioners and others struggling with the cost of living should contact their local council to see what support may be available to them, as they may be able to receive support from the Household Support Fund, Council Tax Reduction, or through energy support programmes such as the Homes Upgrade Grant and Energy Company Obligation.

We are also supporting consumers, including pensioners, through the Government's ambitious Warm Homes Plan – which will transform homes across the country, making them cleaner and cheaper to run. We've committed £3.4 billion over the next 3 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.

Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives and reducing pressures on the NHS.

The difficult decisions we have made, such as targeting the Winter Fuel Payment, mean the Government is able to provide additional investment in the NHS, which benefits everyone including all pensioners who rely on these services. We have committed to returning NHS waiting times – including those for A&E and ambulances – to the standards set out in the NHS constitution that patients rightly expect.

■ Pension Credit

Chris Law:

[19699]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many applications for Pension Credit were received between (a) 29 July 2024 and 30 November 2024, (b) 29 July 2023 and 30 November 2023 and (c) 29 July 2022 and 30 November 2022.

Emma Reynolds:

On 28 November we published Pension Credit applications and award statistics. This publication provides application volumes up to 17 November 2024. Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - [GOV.UK, which is the nearest available data to the 30 November](#).

This information is updated quarterly and the next update, which will include end of November data is due around the end of February 2025. This release will cover data up to week commencing 10 February 2024.

- These statistics show that 150,000 Pension Credit claims were received between 29 July 2024 up to 17 November 2024.
- In the previous year we received around 67,000 applications for the closest comparable period, which was 31 July 2023 to 19 November 2023.
- The closest comparable period in 2022 shows we received around 87,500 applications between 1 August 2022 and 20 November 2022.

Please note, the figures presented are from DWP's Pension Credit system which has previously been collected for internal departmental operations use only and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics publication standards.

Mr Peter Bedford:

[20109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners eligible for Pension Credit in each region.

Mr Peter Bedford:

[20110]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners eligible for but not claiming Pension Credit in each region.

Emma Reynolds:

No estimate has been made of the number of pensioners eligible for Pension Credit by region.

According to the latest available data, in financial year ending 2023, an estimated 2,134,000 households were eligible for Pension Credit in Great Britain. This has been

calculated by adding the estimated number of households who are entitled to but not receiving Pension Credit to the number of eligible households that received Pension Credit. It is not possible to break this figure down by region.

In published DWP Pension Credit Take-up statistics, it is estimated that up to 760,000 households who were entitled to receive Pension Credit did not claim the benefit. These statistics are only available at Great Britain level and cannot be broken down to smaller geographical areas. The latest available Pension Credit take-up statistics for Great Britain cover the financial year 2022 to 2023 and are available at: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

The published Pension Credit caseload for Great Britain, for financial year 2022 to 2023 shows that an estimated 1,374,000 households received Pension Credit. This is obtained from the latest published Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2024 and is available at: [Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

■ Pension Credit: Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

Rebecca Smith:

[20884]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of disregarding payments from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme when calculating eligibility for Pension Credit.

Emma Reynolds:

I refer the honourable member to the answer given on 18 November 2024 to question UIN [14156](#).

■ Pension Credit: South Devon

Caroline Voaden:

[20853]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Pension Credit applications have been received in South Devon constituency since 22 August 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

On 28 November we published national Pension Credit applications and award statistics. This publication provides application volumes from 29 July 2024 to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

Data is captured weekly and cannot be broken down further to give a figure from 22 August 2024 exactly. The statistics show that 128,000 Pension Credit claims were received between 19 August 2024 and 17 November 2024. This figure has been rounded to the nearest 1000.

Please note, the figures presented are from DWP's Pension Credit system which has previously been collected for internal departmental operations use only and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics publication standards.

We do not currently hold data at a constituency level.

■ Pensions

Mike Martin:

[\[20515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of providing indexation of pension rights accrued before April 1997.

Emma Reynolds:

It is for sponsoring employers to decide what pension benefits they offer, provided these meet minimum standards. These benefits are set out in the scheme rules. It would not be appropriate for the Government to interfere in decisions made by individual schemes, beyond setting clear, affordable minimum standards that apply to all.

Pensions legislation does not usually apply new provisions retrospectively to rights that have already been accrued. It is generally seen to be unreasonable to add liabilities to pension schemes that could not have been taken into account in the funding assumptions that determined the contributions to be paid at the time. In some cases, the additional, unplanned liabilities could result in significant additional contributions from the sponsoring employer, and could ultimately threaten the future viability of some schemes.

It is important to achieve a balance between providing members with some measure of protection against inflation and not increasing schemes' costs beyond a level that schemes and employers can generally afford.

■ Poverty: Leicester

Shivani Raja:

[\[20057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to reduce levels of child poverty in Leicester.

Alison McGovern:

Tackling child poverty is at the heart of this Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, and the Child Poverty Taskforce is working to publish the Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025. We published our framework 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy' on 23 October and will explore all available levers to drive forward short and long-term actions across government to reduce child poverty.

The Strategy will look at policies across four key themes of increasing incomes, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience, and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The Taskforce will hear directly from experts on each of the Strategy's themes including children and families living in poverty and work with leading organisations, charities, and campaigners.

The vital work of the Taskforce comes alongside our commitments to triple investment to over £30 million to roll out free breakfast clubs at all primary schools,

reducing the cap on UC deductions to 15%, further extending the Household Support Fund until 31 March 2026, and increasing the National Living Wage by 6.7% to £12.21 an hour boosting the pay of over 3m workers. Alongside this, we are committed to reviewing Universal Credit to make sure it is doing the job we want it to do.

We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty. Backed by £240m investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will target and tackle economic inactivity and unemployment and join up employment, health and skills support to meet the needs of local communities.

■ Poverty: Older People

Victoria Collins:

[20093]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help tackle poverty experienced by older people, in the context of changes to the eligibility criteria for the winter fuel payment.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is honouring our commitment to the Triple Lock with a 4.1% increase to the basic State Pension and the new State Pension; and we are also increasing the standard minimum guarantee in Pension Credit by 4.1%. As such, according to the latest OBR projections, the full yearly rate of the new State Pension is forecast to increase by around £1,900 over the course of this parliament whilst the full yearly amount of the basic State Pension is forecast to increase by around £1,500.

The Government also offers an array of support to ensure pensioners remain comfortable and safe in the winter months. This includes direct financial help to low-income pensioners through Pension Credit, Cold Weather Payments and the Warm Home Discount (in England & Wales).

We know there are low-income pensioners who aren't claiming Pension Credit. We want to ensure as many people as possible have access to this support and urge pensioners to check their eligibility. Pension Credit will passport them to receive Winter Fuel Payments in future, alongside other benefits – hundreds of pounds that could really help them. Our take-up campaign has been successful in boosting applications by 145% since July.

The Warm Home Discount scheme provides eligible low-income households across Great Britain with a £150 rebate on their winter energy bill. This winter, we expect over 3 million households, including over 1 million pensioners, to benefit under the scheme.

The Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500 million Winter Support Commitment for customers, which will help customers most in need by providing credit on bills, enhanced debt write-off schemes, and increased funding for charity partners to target hard to reach customers.

Low-income pensioners and others struggling with the cost of living should contact their local council to see what support may be available to them, as they may be able to receive support from the Household Support Fund, Council Tax Reduction, or through energy support programmes such as the Homes Upgrade Grant and Energy Company Obligation.

We are also supporting consumers, including pensioners, through the Government's ambitious Warm Homes Plan – which will transform homes across the country, making them cleaner and cheaper to run. We've committed £3.4 billion over the next 3 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.

Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives and reducing pressures on the NHS.

The difficult decisions we have made, such as targeting the Winter Fuel Payment, mean the Government is able to provide additional investment in the NHS, which benefits everyone including all pensioners who rely on these services. We have committed to returning NHS waiting times – including those for A&E and ambulances – to the standards set out in the NHS constitution that patients rightly expect.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Leicester

Shivani Raja:

[20058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of compensating women impacted by changes to women's State Pension age in Leicester; and what steps she is taking to support the women impacted.

Emma Reynolds:

In their investigation into communication of changes to State Pension age, the Ombudsman did not examine changes to the State Pension age itself, they examined how the policy was communicated. So, we have done no such assessment.

We are committed to supporting pensioners – with millions set to see their yearly State Pension rise by up to £1,900 over this parliament, through our commitment to the Triple Lock.

Support is available through the welfare system to those who are unable to work or are on a low income but are not eligible for pensioner benefits because of their age.

The Government is also delivering a comprehensive package of support to help those aged 50 and over to remain in and return to work.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

Clive Jones:

[\[20094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024, if she will make it her policy to implement the recommendations of that report in full.

Emma Reynolds:

Following careful consideration of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report into how changes to the State Pension age were communicated, the Government has decided we will not be paying compensation. We have made our decision on the facts of the matter which we have set out in our detailed response and deposited in the House Library.

■ Unemployment: Young People

Matt Vickers:

[\[19420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of trends in the level of youth unemployment since 2010.

Alison McGovern:

Youth unemployment in 2010 was high following the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession. The unemployment rate for 16 to 24-year-olds for Jul-Sep 2024 is 14.8% (4.5 percentage points lower than in Jul-Sep 2010). In recent quarters the youth unemployment rate has been increasing. It has increased by 2.8 percentage points on the year.

To address this our plan to get Britain working includes a new Youth Guarantee for all young people aged 18-21 to ensure that they can access quality training opportunities, an apprenticeship or help to find work to reduce the number of young people not earning or learning. We are working with eight Youth Guarantee Trailblazers areas to test new ways of supporting young people into employment or training, by bringing together and enhancing existing programmes in partnership with local areas. We expect the trailblazers to launch from Spring 2025.

The White Paper also sets out a range of measures to prevent youth inactivity before 18 – including an expansion of work experience and careers advice, action to tackle school attendance and steps to improve access to mental health services for young people

Recent unemployment estimates are subject to heightened volatility due to ongoing data quality problems with the ONS Labour Force Survey. This is particularly the case for the 16 to 24-year-old group, which as a smaller population group has wider margins of error than whole population estimates. Additionally, data prior to Jun-Aug 2011 has not been re-weighted by the ONS causing a discontinuity.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Future of Harland and Wolff

Secretary of State for Business and Trade, and President of the Board of Trade (Jonathan Reynolds):

[\[HCWS344\]](#)

National security is the foundation of our Plan for Change – without it we can't deliver on our milestones to raise living standards across the UK, with good, skilled, productive jobs.

I am pleased to announce that a commercial deal has been reached, subject to approvals, that will see Navantia UK – a specialist in shipbuilding – purchase Harland and Wolff's shipyards in Belfast, Arnish and Methil in Scotland, and Appledore in Devon. This industry-led deal will secure the future of all four of Harland and Wolff's shipyards and protect around 1,000 jobs across the UK.

The deal will ensure the delivery of the Ministry of Defence's Fleet Solid Support (FSS) contract. The Government has worked closely with Navantia UK on the future of the FSS Programme. We've agreed with Navantia UK on the absolute minimum of changes to the contract, ensuring its continued delivery.

Defence is at the heart of the Industrial Strategy where we have identified it as one of eight growth-driving sectors for the UK economy. Our Industrial Strategy is unreservedly pro-business, engaging on complex issues that are barriers to growth and investment.

Navantia UK has committed to invest significantly on commercial terms into Harland and Wolff's shipyards, a major investment into the UK's industrial base. This is a good deal for Harland and Wolff, its employees, and the British shipbuilding sector more broadly, as it provides the best opportunity to sustain essential sovereign shipbuilding capacity and capability for future naval work, safeguarding both current and future jobs in the UK.

We are committed to supporting vibrant and successful shipbuilding and offshore fabrication industries, and our skilled workforces who deliver them, in all parts of the UK, in which Harland and Wolff has an important role to play.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Price Review 2024 Final Determinations

Secretary of State (Steve Reed):

[\[HCWS345\]](#)

Our water system needs fixing. Our rivers, lakes and seas are choked by pollution.

Under the Conservatives, our sewage system crumbled. They irresponsibly let water companies divert customers' money to line the pockets of their bosses and shareholders.

The public are right to be angry after they have been left to pay the price of Conservative failure.

This Labour Government will ringfence money earmarked for investment so it can never be diverted for bonuses and shareholder payouts. We will clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

Ofwat, the independent economic regulator, has today published their Final Determinations for Price Review 2024. This independent process sets the prices water companies can charge customers in the form of water bills over five years. This includes a confirmed £104 billion of water company expenditure over the next five years (2025 to 2030). This is the highest level of investment in the water sector since privatisation. This investment will be crucial to deliver the improvements in the sector that the public expect to see.

In the next five years, the increase in bills is expected to pay for:

- £12 billion investment to reduce harm from storm overflows which will reduce storm overflow pollution by 27%, including upgrading more than 2,800 storm overflows.
- An £8 billion investment to boost water supply, including progressing nine new reservoirs.
- Leakage reduction of 17% - taking it to the lowest since privatisation.
- 30,000 new jobs across the country.

While this much needed investment in the sector is welcomed, no one wants to see these bill rises, but customers have been left to pay the price of Conservative failure.

This Labour Government will ensure that this can never happen again by ringfencing money earmarked for investment, so it is spent on cutting sewage spills and improving services for customers – not on bonuses and shareholder payouts. If the money is not spent how it was intended, it will be refunded to customers.

We expect water companies to put robust support in place for customers that are struggling to pay their bills, and ensure customers know how to access it. These include:

- Bill discount schemes such as WaterSure and Social Tariffs.
- Actively offering payment breaks or payment holidays.
- Adjusting payment plans urgently to help with sudden changes in household finances.
- Simplifying the processes for customers to get extra assistance.
- Helping customers get advice on benefits and managing debts.

And going forward, we have a plan to fundamentally reset the water sector – so we are not just fixing past failure, but also unlocking opportunities for the future.

We are putting accountability back at the heart of our water system. The Water Special Measures Bill will put a stop to the behaviour that has so enraged the public. It will strengthen regulations, including new powers to ban the payment of bonuses for water bosses if environmental standards are not met and bring criminal charges against

lawbreakers, with new, tougher penalties including imprisonment when companies obstruct investigations.

We have launched an Independent Commission into the water sector and its regulation to put customers first, transform how our water system works and clean up rivers, lakes and seas for good. This is expected to form the largest review of the industry since privatisation.

This is a once in a generation chance to reset our water sector and deliver the change we all want to see. After years of pollution and decline it's time to invest in new opportunities and restore our clean rivers, lakes and seas.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Hospices

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): [\[HCWS348\]](#)

This government wants a society where every person receives high-quality, compassionate care from diagnosis through to the end of life.

Palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB) must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supporting commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care.

Whilst the majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by NHS staff and services, we recognise the vital part that voluntary sector organisations, including hospices, also play in providing support to people at the end of life and their loved ones.

This government is determined to shift more healthcare out of hospitals and into the community, to ensure patients and their families receive personalised care in the most appropriate setting and palliative and end of life care services, including hospices, will have a big role to play in that shift.

This government recognises the range of cost pressures the hospice sector has been facing over a number of years. In recognition of this, I am delighted to update the House that £100 million in additional capital funding is being provided to support the hospice sector. We believe that this capital investment will help with physical and operational pressures that hospices are facing. This package will allow hospices to create an improved physical environment and allow them to focus on providing the best quality care to patients.

The £100 million in additional capital funding will be spent across the remainder of this financial year (2024/25) and next (2025/26).

The principal requirements for the £100 million capital funding would be for hospices to deliver improvements that directly benefit patients, have a tangible impact on the physical environment and provide value for money.

I am also delighted to announce that children and young people's hospices will receive a further £26 million revenue funding for 2025/26. This is a continuation of the funding which until recently was known as the children and young people's hospice grant.

These two funding streams will help both adult and children's hospices in England to continue delivering the best end of life care possible for patients, their families, and loved ones.

The allocation and distribution method for both strands of this additional funding will be set out in early 2025.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Compulsory Purchase Reforms

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS346\]](#)

I am today publishing a consultation on reforms to the compulsory purchase process and compensation provisions in England and Wales.

The government is determined to achieve its hugely ambitious Plan for Change milestones of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes and fast-tracking 150 planning decisions on major infrastructure by the end of this Parliament.

To support the delivery of a range of development, regeneration and infrastructure projects in the public interest, we need to make better use of underutilised land across the country. We know that many local authorities share this objective, but their plans are all too often frustrated by onerous barriers to land assembly, complex purchasing processes, and unrealistic compensation expectations on the part of landowners. The result is significant amounts of developable land that remains unused and overpriced.

In its 2024 general election manifesto, the government committed to further reforming compulsory purchase compensation rules to improve land assembly, speed up site delivery, and deliver housing, infrastructure, amenity, and transport benefits in the public interest. We promised to take steps to ensure that for specific types of development schemes, landowners are awarded fair compensation rather than inflated prices based on the prospect of planning permission being granted on the land in the future – known as 'hope value'.

The eight-week consultation that we are launching today is the next step in fulfilling this commitment. Building on the government's 9 September commencement of regulations that enact the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 power to remove 'hope value' from the assessment of compensation in compulsory purchase cases by directions where justified in the public interest, the consultation proposes new reforms to the process for compulsorily acquiring land without hope value compensation through general directions on certain types of sites that deliver clear benefits in the public interest.

The objective is twofold. First, to make the compulsory purchase process faster and more efficient so that acquiring authorities are incentivised to make use of it where appropriate.

Second, to enable more land value to be captured where justified in the public interest and then invested in schemes for public benefit.

The consultation also seeks views on broader reforms to ensure the balance of the assessment of compensation awarded to landowners is fair, both to speed-up decisions on compulsory purchase orders and to reduce the administrative costs of undertaking compulsory purchase.

Through this consultation, we want to understand better how the proposed reforms would operate in practice and how successfully they would deliver on our objectives of streamlining the compulsory purchase process and bringing forward much needed development including for housing, regeneration and infrastructure.

Subject to feedback to this consultation, we intend to bring forward measures in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to implement the changes.

I look forward to continuing to work with all those with an interest in improving the compulsory purchase process and compensation regimes to make sure our reforms are robust and deliverable.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ British Sign Language (BSL) Report 2023 – 2024

Minister of State (Minister for Social Security and Disability) (Sir Stephen Timms):
[\[HCWS347\]](#)

This government is committed to removing barriers and increasing opportunities for Deaf and disabled people. The British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022 provides us with the ability to do this by creating a greater recognition and understanding of BSL, and also by requiring the government to report on what each department listed in the Act has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public.

The publication of the first BSL report in 2023 provided a snapshot of the activity that had already been delivered by government departments in the first year since the Act gained Royal Assent, whilst also highlighting the areas of government communication that needed further improvement.

The second BSL report, covering the period from 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024, has been published. A copy of the second report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on GOV.UK.

This second report summarises the progress government departments have made, and highlights where we have further to go. It shows that there has been an increase in the use of BSL compared to the first report - the overall number of BSL communications produced by government departments has more than doubled, from 76 in the first reporting period to 176 during the second reporting period. This represents encouraging progress but also shows that there are still improvements to be made.

This government wants to ensure disabled people's views and voices are at the heart of all we do and ensuring that government communications are made accessible to Deaf and Disabled people is essential in supporting us to achieve this goal.

This government is committed to going further. We will be working with the BSL Advisory Board, Deaf people and their representative organisations, and with Ministers across government to continue to make tangible improvements for the Deaf community.

We will publish a report every year for the next five years, going further than the frequency required by the Act. The next report will be published in July 2025.