



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 17 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:25 P.M., 17 January 2025). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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**Notes:**

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

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

## ANSWERS

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

#### ■ Attorney General: Cultural Heritage

**Nick Timothy:** [\[22759\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) the Attorney General's Office and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies.

**Lucy Rigby:**

There has been no change in the Attorney General's Office's management of artwork or heritage assets since the previous administration.

As separate entities, the responsibility for creating policy and guidance for artwork sits with each individual Arm's Length Body, rather than with the ministerial department.

#### ■ Attorney General: Industrial Disputes

**Nick Timothy:** [\[23029\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Lucy Rigby:**

There are no ongoing industrial disputes within the Attorney General's Office, Government Legal Department, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, Serious Fraud Office, or Crown Prosecution Service.

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Board of Trade

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[23921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, who the advisers are to the Board of Trade.

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[23922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 10261 on Board of Trade, whether the review into the Board of Trade has concluded; and what his planned timetable is for making a decision on the (a) appointment and (b) future direction of the Board.



**Gareth Thomas:**

The Department of Business and Trade (DBT) is currently in the process of appointing new Board of Trade (BoT) advisors. The advisors will be announced when an agreement has been reached, and advisors have been formally appointed.

The BoT will continue as a key trade promotion and trade advocacy vehicle for DBT in support of the Government's Trade Strategy, exports and growth agenda. The inaugural meeting of the BoT will take place following the appointment of new advisors.

**Exports: USA****Calum Miller:**[\[24084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of US policies made between 20 January 2017 and 20 January 2021 on UK exporters.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The UK government is committed to monitoring US policies and considering what action is best to promote and safeguard UK business interests.

Between January 2017 and January 2021, we engaged the US administration extensively on a range of US policies, including in the context of UK-US FTA negotiations. Beyond 2021, we have continued engaging with the US to improve access to the US market for UK exporters, including by securing the removal of Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminium products.

**UK Trade with EU****Calum Miller:**[\[24086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on international trade since 5 November 2024.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> of November the Secretary of State has held positive discussions with European Commission Executive Vice President Teresa Ribera (15 January) and the Spanish Minister for Economy, Trade and Business, Carlos Cuerdo (14 November) on shared trade interests. We look forward to continuing to build these relationships with the new Commissioners.

**CABINET OFFICE****Cabinet Office: Written Questions****Emily Thornberry:**[\[23726\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to respond to Question 20170 on Cabinet Office: Ministers' Private Offices, tabled on 16 December 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

With apologies to the Rt. Hon. Member, the answer has now been published.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ **Broadcasting****Munira Wilson:**[\[22681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will include podcasts in the broadcasting code.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government has no plans to widen the scope of the Broadcasting Code to include all online podcasts.

■ **Charities: Employers' Contributions****Jack Rankin:**[\[902186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions on charities.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:**[\[902189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions on charities.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government highly values the charity sector, and its positive contribution across society.

Due to the difficult economic inheritance from the previous government, we have had to take a number of difficult decisions on tax, welfare and spending to fix the public finances, fund public services, and restore economic stability.

The Government has considered the implication of this policy change on the charity sector, and the impacts have been published in the usual way by HMRC as part of the Autumn Budget process.

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN), which gives a clear explanation of the policy objective and an assessment of the impacts, was published alongside the National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill on 13 November 2024. This Note includes the impacts of the policy on the Exchequer; the economic impacts of the policy; and the impacts on individuals, businesses, civil society organisations and equality impacts.

**■ Community Development: Israel****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of boycotts of Israeli participation in (a) sporting and (b) cultural events on levels of community cohesion in the UK.

**Chris Bryant:**

Sports, arts, and culture are powerful ways to bring communities together. As such, we do not support sports or cultural boycotts in principle, including in relation to Israel.

Any disruption or threat to community cohesion is of concern. DCMS therefore works closely with sport and cultural stakeholders to identify issues and to minimise any negative impact on community cohesion. The Secretary of State recently met with a delegation led by the Board of Deputies of British Jews to discuss their experiences of working in the arts and cultural sector at a time of increased tension in the Middle East. She was very concerned by the scale and extent of their experiences and made clear her own view, and that of the government, that antisemitism is as unacceptable in the arts as it is anywhere else in society.

**■ Cultural Heritage: Wales****Nick Timothy:** [\[22750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the Welsh Government's guidance entitled Public commemoration in Wales: guidance, updated on 15 November 2024.

**Chris Bryant:**

No, because it is a devolved matter.

**■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Cultural Heritage****Nick Timothy:** [\[22749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies; what the policy of the Government Art Collection is on decolonisation of government art; and what guidance she has issued to (A) museums and (B) National Archives on decolonisation of their collections.

**Chris Bryant:**

No, we have no such plans and have issued no such guidance.

**■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Industrial Disputes****Nick Timothy:** [\[23020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to

their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

There are currently no ongoing industrial disputes within DCMS. Our arm's length bodies are independent employers and are responsible for their own industrial relations.

■ **Football: Women**

**Sarah Owen:**

[R] [\[23843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure grassroots (a) women's and (b) girls' football clubs have the facilities they need to (i) play and (ii) train.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government is committed to supporting every aspect of women's sport and ensuring all women and girls, no matter their background, have access to high quality sport including football.

We are pleased to see the significant progress in the number of women and girls taking up football in recent years, and wider developments in the women's game. In 2023, Karen Carney OBE published a major Independent Review of Women's Football which made a series of recommendations including supporting grassroots women and girls' football. This Government fully endorses those recommendations and looks forward to ensuring tangible progress is made.

We are acting to support more players in getting onto the pitch wherever they live via the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme, which will invest £123 million UK-wide throughout 2024/25. All projects selected for funding through this programme are required to demonstrate how they increase access and participation levels among under-represented groups, which includes women and girls.

Following the Autumn Budget on 30 October 2024, the Government confirmed its continued support for elite and grassroots sport through future investment. Further details will be confirmed in due course.

■ **Gambling**

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

[\[22556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an estimate of the number of high-street gambling operators in possession of non-remote bingo licenses that are operating as adult gambling centres.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

As of 31 March 2024, there were 631 non-remote bingo premises in operation in Great Britain, according to the Gambling Commission's November 2024 Industry Statistics.

As set out in the Gambling Commission's Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice, in licensed bingo premises, gaming machines may only be made available for use where there are also substantive facilities for non-remote bingo available in the premises. Non-remote bingo licensees must also ensure that the function and presentation of their premises are such that a customer can reasonably be expected to recognise that it is a premises licensed for the purposes of providing bingo facilities. These are conditions of non-remote bingo licences. To operate an adult gaming centre, operators require a "gaming machine general operating licence" for an adult gaming centre and an adult gaming centre premises licence.

**■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme: Wimbledon****Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[24076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who the recipients were of grants from the Listed Places of Worship Scheme in Wimbledon since 2001; and how much each recipient received.

**Chris Bryant:**

Since 2022, 21 grants have been awarded to 7 listed places of worship in Wimbledon, totalling £79,716.27.

**■ Local Press****Satvir Kaur:**[\[22831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the sustainability of local journalism including (a) magazines and (b) print media (i) nationally and (ii) in Southampton Test constituency.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Sustainability of local journalism is an area of particular concern for this Government, across the country and in Southampton Test. We are developing a Local Media Strategy, in recognition of the importance of this vital sector. Our vision is a thriving local media that can continue to play an invaluable role as a key channel of trustworthy information at local level, reporting on the issues that matter to communities, reflecting their contributions and perspectives, helping to foster a self-confident nation in which everyone feels that their contribution is part of an inclusive national story.

We are working across Government and with other stakeholders as the Strategy develops and will announce further details in due course.

**Local Press: Southampton****Satvir Kaur:**[\[22832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to encourage local magazine publishing in Southampton Test constituency.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government's Industrial Strategy will support the growth of the creative industries, including publishing which contributes £11.6 billion to the economy and supports 127,000 jobs.

In Southampton, Arts Council England (ACE) supports local writers through Artful Scribe, a not-for-profit development agency. ACE has committed over £184,000 to Artful Scribe through to 2027, including those interested in magazine publishing.

Nationally, ACE invests in poetry magazines such as Poetry London (£50,000 annually) and Wasafiri (£60,506 annually), both National Portfolio Organisations. ACE support also extends to writing development agencies like New Writing South (Brighton, £126,477 annually) and Literature Works (Plymouth, £98,333 annually), which offer guidance to writers seeking opportunities in local magazine publishing.

**Press: Regulation****Siân Berry:**[\[23098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14270 on Press: Regulation, what work her Department is undertaking on this issue; which other Departments have participated; and if she will publish the work completed to date.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

DCMS works with a range of other Departments, including the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Home Office, to support a free, plural, and financially sustainable press sector. This includes work to develop a Local Media Strategy and to deliver the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists.

We will update Parliament in the usual way on any policy developments in this area and work will be published as appropriate.

**Radio: Lincolnshire****Sir John Hayes:**[\[23121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to support new FM licences for radio stations in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The growth and development of digital radio and changes in listener behaviour have resulted in a clear shift away from analogue listening – digital listening now accounts

for 74% of all radio listening (RAJAR Q3 2024). Although AM/FM platforms remain important for smaller commercial and community stations, significant numbers of listeners are migrating to digital platforms.

The licensing of AM/FM radio services is a matter for Ofcom, and in October Ofcom set out its current approach to licensing in a progress report on the rollout of small-scale DAB (SSDAB) technology. This report set out Ofcom's current view that SSDAB offers audiences a wider range of services and makes a more efficient use of spectrum than FM, and committed to at least two further rounds of SSDAB licensing before considering the possibility of any further analogue licensing in the future.

## ■ Religious Buildings: Repairs and Maintenance

**James McMurdock:**

[\[22879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has to maintain historic places of worship.

**Chris Bryant:**

There is a range of funding available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies that supports places of worship. These include Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who have committed to investing around £100m between 2023 and 2026 to support places of worship; the Churches Conservation Trust, which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, funding £9 million worth of repairs to buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register between April 2024 and March 2025.

We will shortly announce the outcomes of the Business Planning process, including for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

## ■ Rugby

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[23177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December 2024 to Question 20261 on Rugby, if she will have further discussions with (a) the Rugby Football Union and (b) Premiership Rugby on (i) current governance issues and (ii) securing necessary partnerships to ensure the long-term stability of the game, in the context of the Rugby Football Union's rejection of a Special General Meeting about the future of the game and rugby governance.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

I meet regularly with stakeholders such as the Rugby Football Union and Premiership Rugby. The RFU is independent of the Government and is responsible for the regulation and governance of rugby union, and for protecting and promoting the financial sustainability of the sport.

My department will continue to work with the RFU, representatives of Premiership clubs and Championship clubs, and the wider sport sector to support the ongoing sustainability of elite and community level rugby union.

**■ Women Football: Women****Sarah Owen:****[R] [23842]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support grassroots (a) women's and (b) girls' football.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government is committed to supporting every aspect of women's sport and ensuring all women and girls, no matter their background, have access to high quality sport including football.

We are pleased to see the significant progress in the number of women and girls taking up football in recent years, and wider developments in the women's game. In 2023, Karen Carney OBE published a major Independent Review of Women's Football which made a series of recommendations including supporting grassroots women and girls' football. This Government fully endorses those recommendations and looks forward to ensuring tangible progress is made.

The Government has set out its support for grassroots facilities, including through the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities programme which provides funding to build and improve grassroots facilities and a commitment to support the Football Association's ambition to double their number of gold-standard (3-star) community clubs by EURO 2028. This will deliver more opportunities for women and girls to get on the pitch.

The Football Association is a long-term partner of Sport England, and have received over £26 million of funding from them for the period 2022-27.

**DEFENCE****■ Middle East: Navy****Andrew Rosindell:****[22591]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he has taken to ensure the continued presence of Royal Navy assets in the Middle East maritime theatre.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Ministry of Defence keeps its force posture in the Middle East under continual review to safeguard the UK's national security interests and operational requirements. We remain committed to working with our partners across the region. The Strategic Defence Review, due to be published in the Spring, will set out Defence's strategic priorities and context for subsequent resource allocation, including informing the global distribution of Royal Navy assets.

**■ Ministry of Defence: Carbon Emissions****Richard Tice:****[23055]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has spent on measures to achieve net zero targets in the last five years.



**Luke Pollard:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is fully committed to contributing to the UK achieving its legal commitment to be Net Zero by 2050. Between Financial Year 1209-20 and Financial Year 2023-24, the MOD has reduced its overall emissions from 3,650,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e to 3,012,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e.

Defence spending is investing in building our warfighting capability and to enhance operational advantage and resilience to protect our values and interests. Benefits of decarbonisation are a positive spillover and are not differentiated from this investment. For example, trials integrating alternative fuel sources and renewable energy technology can further unlock an ability to operate for longer periods without resupply and at greater reach across a dispersed battlefield.

A more detailed breakdown of Defence energy use and associated carbon emissions can be found in the [MOD Annual Report and Accounts Annex D](#).

**■ Official Secrets: Disclosure of Information****James Cartlidge:****[22953]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help prevent the leaking of military secrets during online war games.

**Luke Pollard:**

Unauthorised release of information endangers our national security and makes protecting the United Kingdom harder. As such it is contrary to the ethos and policies of the Ministry of Defence, and we take the unauthorised release of information very seriously. Our policy stresses that information should be handled and distributed based on need-to-know, where access to sensitive information is no wider than necessary for the efficient conduct of official work, and is limited to those with a business need and the appropriate personnel security clearance. This approach is reinforced in mandatory training and through our Cyber Security Awareness, Behaviour and Culture campaign, which reinforces the importance of managing online footprints and not sharing information inappropriately.

**■ Reserve Forces: Recruitment****Mr Calvin Bailey:****[R] [23015]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking steps to increase recognition and accreditation of relevant civilian courses to facilitate recruitment of university students into the Reserves.

**Mr Calvin Bailey:****[R] [23016]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the his Department's report entitled Reserve Forces Review 2030: Unlocking the reserves' potential to strengthen a resilient and global Britain, published in May 2021, what targeted programmes exist to support those in (a) higher education and (b) further education to join the Reserves.

**Mr Calvin Bailey:**

[R] [\[23017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what funding options are available to students in (a) higher education and (b) further education who commit to joining the Reserves.

**Al Carns:**

In line with recommendations made by the Haythornthwaite Review and the Pan Defence Skills Framework, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) believes there is value in recognising and accrediting the learning, experience and qualifications achieved by individuals outside of Defence.

There are a number of targeted programmes allowing those in higher and further education to experience the Armed Forces and potential careers in the Regular or Reserve Forces, including University Royal Navy Units (URNU), University Officer Training Corps and University Air Squadron students. As an example, since 2015 the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) has been running a condensed fast-track Phase 1 training programme in the summer months to deliberately align with longer student vacations. Since 2021 the programme has been extended to officer cadets of the URNU, with seamless transfer to the RNR as an option for successful trainees.

There are currently no specific funding options to incentivise higher or further education students to join the Maritime Reserves or Royal Air Force Reserves. Students wishing to join the Army Reserves as Officers can apply for a financial bounty for £1,200, paid in two stages, the first payment on enlistment and the second on completion of their training. The Army also has four support schemes available for students in sixth form and higher and further education, ranging from Army Scholarships worth £3,000 per candidate to a Defence STEM Undergraduate Sponsorship whereby Candidates have their tuition fees paid and receive £5,000 per annum for three university years.

## ■ USA: Military Alliances

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[22784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions on future US-UK defence collaboration he has had with the incoming US Defense Secretary.

**Luke Pollard:**

The US is our closest security ally. The Government looks forward to working with the incoming US Administration in the months and years ahead. The Senate confirmation process is ongoing for members of President-elect Trump's cabinet.

The Prime Minister had a warm introductory call with President-Elect Trump on 6 November and spoke again with the President-elect on 18 December. The Prime Minister offered his congratulations and said he looked forward to working closely with President-elect Trump across all areas of the special relationship and our shared priorities, including international security.

## EDUCATION

### ■ Apprentices and Training: Ashfield

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[22977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to support (a) vocational training and (b) apprenticeship programs in Ashfield constituency.

**Janet Daby:**

This government is working to create a clear, flexible, high-quality skills system that supports people of all ages, breaking down the barriers to opportunity and driving economic growth.

The department has established Skills England to ensure we have the highly-trained workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs of the next decade. It will ensure the skills system is clear and navigable for both young people and older adults, strengthening careers pathways into jobs across the economy.

The department's levy-funded growth and skills offer, with apprenticeships at its heart, will deliver greater flexibility for learners and employers across England, including in Ashfield, and is aligned with our industrial strategy to create routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries. As a first step, this will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, fuelling innovation in businesses across the country and providing high quality entry pathways for young people.

Latest data provided by West Nottinghamshire College confirms a total of 1343 apprentices in learning. Of this, 522 apprentices are either living or employed in Ashfield District, which is around 39% of the total. The sectors with the most apprentices either living or are from Ashfield are Building and Construction (128), Engineering (118), Manufacturing Technologies (93) and Administration (59).

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) support the department's long term priority to drive local economic growth by reshaping the skills system to better align provision of post-16 technical education and training with local labour market needs and to support learners to gain the skills needed to get good jobs. The LSIP covering Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, which includes Ashfield, seeks to improve basic literacy and understanding of needs for learners and employees, digital skills as a key component of Technical Education courses, an increase in pre-16 engagement and skills development targeting young people, and basic employability skills that focus on for-work readiness.

West Nottinghamshire College is a large further education (FE) college based in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, operating across nine centres and has specialist engineering and building services centres in Ashfield, with a construction skills training centre in Sutton-in-Ashfield. The college's engineering training centre has been named as the UK's first Gene Haas Centre for Advanced Manufacturing in partnership with the Gene Haas Foundation.

The college has a well-established supported internship programme, which includes Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Capita and National Grid amongst its employer partners. The college's high needs provision was recognised as outstanding by Ofsted in June 2023. Additionally, the college has embarked on a three-year programme to develop programmes further so that local employers, including in Ashfield, can benefit from a more diverse workforce.

The college has strong links with key public sector employers within Mansfield and Ashfield, including both district councils and the local hospital. The college's principal is chair of the Making Mansfield Place Board and a member of the college's executive leadership team is vice chair of the Discover Ashfield Place Board.

High-quality careers advice is an essential part of our missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and to drive economic growth. Our ambition is for everyone to have access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance throughout their lives. This will help open up more opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to access the skills and training they need to succeed in the workplace and to advance their careers.

## ■ **British Empire: Curriculum**

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[23019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance his Department issues to schools and local education authorities on the teaching around the British Empire in the National Curriculum.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The national curriculum for history for key stages 1 to 3 includes references to the British Empire and gives teachers and schools the flexibility to use specific examples to teach pupils about the history of Britain and the wider world.

The British Empire could be taught across the three key stages. At key stage 1, pupils should be taught about changes within living memory, events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally, and the lives of significant individuals in the past who have contributed to national and international achievements. At key stage 2, when teaching about the concept of empire and teaching about other empires, further foundations can be developed for the teaching of the British Empire.

Teaching about the British Empire can take place across the time periods and themes at key stage 3. Within the statutory themes of 'the development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745', 'ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901', 'challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day', there are non-statutory examples of what children might be taught about the British Empire. The British Empire could also be taught within the requirement for the study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066 and within local history across the three key stages.

As part of the flexibility all schools have in teaching the national curriculum, schools and teachers are able to determine which examples, topics and resources to use to stimulate and challenge pupils and reflect key points in history.

The department announced a Curriculum and Assessment Review last year. The review's interim report is due to be published in early 2025, with a final report later in the year.

## ■ Carers: Social Security Benefits

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[22689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress her Department has made on the kinship allowance trial; how many kinship carers will be able to join the trial; what date she plans to launch the trial; and whether the findings of the trial be published.

**Janet Daby:**

The department recognises the important role that kinship carers play in caring for some of the most vulnerable children, and the role of local authorities to support them.

The government has recently announced a £40 million package to trial a new Kinship Allowance 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 pilot will begin in 2025.

This government's ambition is that all kinship carers will get the support they need to care for their children. It is important that we first build the evidence base to find out how best to deliver financial support for kinship families, therefore we will be evaluating this pilot. Decisions about future national rollout will be informed by the findings of the evaluation.

The department will share further details on the process for selecting local authorities in due course.

## ■ Child Sexual Abuse Independent Panel Inquiry

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[23041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to implement the recommendations of the report by Professor Alexis Jay entitled Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, HC 720, published on 20 October 2022.

**Janet Daby:**

As my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister has made clear, the government is focused on delivering the change and justice victims deserve.

On 7 January, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department outlined in Parliament commitments to introduce a mandatory duty for those engaging with children to report sexual abuse and exploitation, making grooming an aggravating factor to toughen up sentencing, and introducing a new performance framework for policing.

The government is working at pace to address the recommendations in the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. That is happening now and the government is determined to finally deliver for victims after years of no action being taken.

■ **Childcare: Finance**

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[22411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, is she will take steps to extend funding for pre-school child care provision beyond 38 weeks a year.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[22412\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason funding for pre-school care provision is restricted to 38 weeks per year, the same number of weeks as school term time.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[22413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to support parents and carers that require more than 38 weeks of funded pre-school care provision per year.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The government's Plan for Change set the ambition of a record number of children starting school ready to learn, measured by the number meeting the early learning goals, and accessible, high-quality early education and childcare is a crucial part of this. The government is committed to delivering the expansion of early years entitlements to enable eligible working parents of children aged from nine months to access 30 hours of funded childcare from September 2025, boosting children's life chances and parents work choices.

Early years early education and childcare entitlements are available for either 15 or 30 hours, over 38 weeks a year, which aligns to school terms. Early years entitlements can be stretched so parents and carers have fewer hours over more weeks, up to 52 weeks a year, but cannot be compressed into fewer than 38 weeks.

Additionally, parents can access Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) and Universal Credit. TFC can save parents up to £2,000 per year on the cost of childcare, or up to £4,000 for eligible children with disabilities. The eligibility criteria for TFC are the same as the working parent entitlement. Eligible Universal Credit claimants can claim back up to 85% of their registered childcare costs each month, regardless of the number of hours they work.

This government had a dire financial inheritance with a £22 billion black hole in the nation's finances. Our first priority must be to fix the economic foundations of our country, and any policy changes must be affordable.

## ■ Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

**Robin Swann:**

[\[23240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she had discussions with the Minister of Education in Northern Ireland on Clause 56 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**Janet Daby:**

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

The department has engaged with the devolved governments during the development of the Bill.

The department is committed to keeping our devolved government colleagues properly engaged on matters with cross-border impact and will continue to do so throughout the progression of the Bill and our implementation planning.

## ■ Choir Schools Association: Finance

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[23835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to continue the grant to the Choir Schools Association in the next academic year.

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[23836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much her Department granted to the Choir Schools Association through the Music and Dance Scheme in each year since 2010.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department will announce future funding for the Music and Dance Scheme for the 2025/26 academic year following the conclusion of the Spending Review in the spring. This includes consideration of the grant to the Choir Schools Association for the Choir Schools Scholarship Scheme.

The department has provided a grant of over £216,000 per year for the Choir Schools Scholarship Scheme between 2010 and 2025.

## ■ Civil Servants

**Charlie Dewhirst:**

[\[22812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many staff are employed in the Policy Profession Unit; what the headcount allocation for that Unit is; what grades each civil servant who works in the Unit is; and how many of these are (a) policy professionals and (b) administrative support staff.

**Janet Daby:**

The Policy Profession Unit is the central unit supporting policy professionals across the UK civil service. The Unit holds the competency framework for the profession and supports policy professionals to build, maintain and grow their professional capability.

The Unit also supports departments in reviewing the environment in which policy is made. Other examples of projects and initiatives the Unit runs are the new Government Policy Fast Stream, which launched in autumn 2024, the annual Policy Festival, with invited speakers from inside and outside government, and the Policy Awards, which aim to recognise high-quality contributions by individuals and teams across the civil service.

The Unit is hosted by the department, as the Permanent Secretary is the Deputy Head of the Government Policy Profession, although the Unit works across government with all departments, agencies and devolved governments.

The following table shows:

- How many staff are employed in the Policy Profession Unit on both a temporary and a permanent basis.
- The headcount for the Unit (there are currently 8 vacant posts).
- The grade mix of staff in the Unit.
- The profession mix of staff in the Unit.

GRADE	CURRENT FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)	TOTAL FTE
Executive Officer	6.2	6.2
Higher Executive Officer	8	9
Senior Executive Officer	8	12
Grade 7	10.8	13.8
Grade 6	3	3
SCS 1 (Deputy Director)	2	2
Total	38.0	46.0 (headcount)

The table below shows the primary government profession for each member of the Policy Profession Unit. Four of these staff provide administrative support across the Unit:

GOVERNMENT PROFESSION	NUMBER OF STAFF
Policy Profession	21
Human Resources	7
Communications	6
Operational Delivery	1



GOVERNMENT PROFESSION	NUMBER OF STAFF
Government Science & Engineering	1
Analysis Function	1
Knowledge & Information Management	1
Total	38

### ■ Department for Education: Industrial Disputes

**Nick Timothy:** [\[22760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) her Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to her Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps she plans to take to end each dispute.

**Janet Daby:**

There are no industrial disputes ongoing within the Department for Education or any associated Arm's Length Bodies.

### ■ Foster Care: East Midlands

**Dr Luke Evans:** [\[22690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to (a) support foster placements and (b) develop regional recruitment hubs in the East Midlands.

**Janet Daby:**

This government is committed to working in partnership with local authorities to recruit more foster carers. This currently includes delivering 10 regional fostering recruitment and retention hubs, covering 64% of local authorities in England. The hubs will transform the way people who are interested in fostering are supported, and rollout of a retention programme which offers peer-support to foster carers and the children in their care. An additional £15 million was announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 to move towards national roll out in the 2025/26 financial year.

Foster For East Midlands Recruitment Hub launched in March 2024 and comprises of four neighbouring local authorities, Derbyshire County Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council, and Derby City Council. The department would welcome discussions with other local authorities in the East Midlands region about national roll out plans.

## ■ Higher Education: Care Leavers

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[22973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of support provided to care leavers to access higher education.

**Janet Daby:**

This government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to pursue higher education (HE), regardless of their background.

HE has an important role in giving care leavers the skills they need to succeed in life. To ensure that care experienced students are supported to gain the qualifications needed to access HE, the department has rolled out post-16 funding to all local authorities which can be used for attainment raising interventions such as additional tutoring. The department is also making the virtual school head role for children with a social worker statutory, enabling earlier intervention to address the educational barriers care experienced children face. Care leavers attending HE are entitled to statutory support from the government, including a bursary of £2000 and accommodation support up to the age of 25, if they require it. In addition, all HE providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) that intend to charge higher level tuition fees are required to have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the OfS. These plans articulate how providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. In creating their plans, providers should consider the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register which details 12 key sector risks across the student lifecycle and the student groups most likely to experience these, including care leavers. Many HE providers have demonstrated positive examples of supporting care leavers, including targeted bursaries, pastoral support and mentoring.

In November the government set out five priorities for an ambitious programme of reform of the HE system, working in partnership with providers and the regulator, the OfS. The department will expect HE providers to play an even stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes, tackling gaps between disadvantaged students and others and making the most of the opportunities presented by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

The department also published its policy paper 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive'. The department is absolutely committed to ensuring that children leaving care have safe and stable accommodation, access to health services, support to build lifelong loving relationships and are engaged in education, employment and training.

## ■ Home Education

**Samantha Niblett:**

[\[23046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students were classified as educated otherwise than at school in the latest period for which figures are available; and

how many children receiving education otherwise than at school funding received less funding in the 2024-25 academic year than in 2023-24.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department collects a range of data on children being educated in contexts other than school. This includes data on children and young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans who, as part of their education, are receiving 'Special educational provision otherwise than in schools, post-16 institutions' under section 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The latest figure for those receiving such support is 8,640, as at January 2024. More information can be found at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>.

Provision set out in an EHC plan is funded by the relevant local authority. The department does not collect funding data from local authorities in enough detail for us to be able to identify funding at an individual level for those whose EHC plan contains provision made under section 61 of the 2014 Act.

■ **Multi-academy Trusts: Pay**

**Cat Smith:**

[22907]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 9 January 2025 to Question 21323 on Multi-academy Trusts: Pay, if she will take steps to collate a table with the total number of academy trusts reporting (a) one, (b) two and (c) three or more members of staff or trustees whose total remuneration was in excess of £150,000 for each of the last five years.

**Cat Smith:**

[22909]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish a breakdown of the total number of trustees of schools multi-academy trusts that received remuneration either as a member of staff as well as a trustee, or in their capacity purely as trustee in excess of (a) £120,000, (b) £130,000, (c) £140,000 and (d) £150,000 including employer pension contributions in each of the last five years.

**Cat Smith:**

[22910]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish (a) the number and (b) a list of trust names of academy trusts in which the highest paid member of staff including employer pension contributions was paid (i) more than £200,000, (ii) more than £250,000, (iii) more than £300,000, (iv) more than £350,000 and (v) more than £400,000 in the last 12 months.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department collates and publishes data annually in the academies sector annual report and accounts on the number of academy trusts with an individual staff member whose emoluments are above £100,000. The data is available in the attached spreadsheet and can also be accessed in the reports published on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academies-sector-annual-reports-and-accounts>.

Emoluments include salary, employer pension contributions and other benefits received during the year. These are reported in bandings of £100,000 to £150,000 and over £150,000.

The academies sector annual report and accounts also publishes information on all trustee remuneration, including pension contributions. This covers bandings including £120,000 to £130,000, £130,000 to £140,000, £140,000 to £150,000, and £150,000 and over. The data is available in the attached spreadsheet and can also be accessed in the reports published on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academies-sector-annual-reports-and-accounts>

The department also publishes an annex alongside the academy sector accounts listing academy trusts paying one or more staff member remuneration of £150,000 in that year.

The academies sector annual report and accounts is drawn from academy trusts' accounts data. The report for 2022 to 2023 will be published shortly and the deadline for academy trusts to submit data for 2023 to 2024 to the department is 28 January 2025.

As referenced in response to Question 21323, academy trusts must publish pay information in their annual audited accounts and on their website. The Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts includes an annex, annex E in the most recently published set, listing all the academy trusts that paid at least one member of staff in excess of £150,000.

**Attachments:**

1. 22907\_22909\_22910\_attachment\_academy\_staff\_emolument  
[22907\_22909\_22910\_attachment\_academy\_staff\_emoluments.xlsx]

## ■ Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

**Jack Rankin:**

**[22856]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information his Department holds on the number of full-time undergraduate students paying international fees who are (a) British nationals and (b) non-domiciled in the UK.

**Janet Daby:**

The department is not able to identify students who are paying international fees who are (a) British nationals and (b) non-domiciled in the UK.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK higher education sector. These data are shared with the department and include a wide range of information on students coming from overseas to study in UK higher education providers (HEPs). Information on the type of fees a student pays, however, is not collected across all UK HEPs.

The legal nationality of the student is collected across all HEPs that submit data to HESA. The department estimates that of the 288,465 full-time, undergraduate, international students (those with permanent address outside the UK) enrolled in UK HEPs in the 2022/23 academic year, 12,805 declared that they held British nationality. Of the remaining full-time, undergraduate, international students, 271,505 declared that they held an overseas nationality and 4,155 have an unknown nationality.

## ■ Pupils: Absenteeism

**Damian Hinds:**

[\[22899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of levels of disadvantaged pupils in schools on rates of absence in schools.

**Damian Hinds:**

[\[22900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what comparative assessment her Department has made of trends in levels of school absence in (a) schools with 40% or more pupils in bands A-F of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and (b) other (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department collects detailed pupil-level data on attendance, which is disaggregated by a number of characteristics, including measures of disadvantage such as the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and free school meal (FSM) eligibility. This data is regularly analysed.

The overall absence rate for FSM eligible pupils in 2022/23 was 11%, which is higher than the 6% absence rate for non-FSM eligible pupils. Similarly, the persistent absence rate and severe absence rates in 2022/23 were 36.1% and 3.9% respectively for FSM-eligible pupils, compared with 15% and 1% for non-FSM eligible pupils.

When overall absence rates are broken down by decile of the IDACI index, the data shows that the most deprived areas, 0-10% on the IDACI index, have the highest levels of absence at 8.3%, while the least deprived areas, 90-100% on the IDACI index, have the lowest levels of absence at 6.3%. A similar pattern holds true for persistent absence, with 25.9% in the most deprived areas, compared to 16.1% in the least deprived areas.

These patterns differ according to phase of school, with secondary schools in the most disadvantaged areas having significantly higher overall absence (10.2%), than primary schools in the most disadvantaged areas (7.0%).

The underlying drivers of school absence are many and varied. Amongst them are several linked to deprivation, including the increasing cost of living, child poverty, poor access to transport, resources and limited access to wider support services.

Research has also shown that parental attitudes, child mental health and school belonging are strongly correlated with attendance.

This government is determined to tackle the generational challenge of school absence as it is a fundamental barrier to learning and life chances. Central to the department's approach are stronger expectations of local authorities and schools, as set out in the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, which was made statutory on 19 August 2024. The guidance promotes a 'support-first' approach and sets out clear expectations on how schools, trusts, local authorities and wider services should work together and with families to address attendance barriers and provide the right support.

Every state school in England should now be sharing their daily attendance register data with the department, local authorities and trusts. These bodies can access this data through a secure, interactive dashboard which is maintained by the department, allowing them to identify patterns and target attendance interventions more effectively.

## ■ Schools: Admissions

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[22771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to monitor capacity in state schools in the context of potential pupil transfers from the private to state sector following the introduction of VAT on school fees.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The government predicts that 35,000 pupils will move into UK state schools in the long-term steady state following the removal of the VAT exemption to school fees. As such, the impact on the state education system as a whole is expected to be small.

This increase in the state sector represents less than 0.5% of total UK state school pupils, of which there are over 9 million. The number expected to move before the end of the 2024/25 academic year is around 3,000. The government expects the associated revenue costs of pupils entering the state sector to steadily increase to a peak of around £0.3 billion after several years.

Every year lots of pupils move between schools, including between the private and state-funded sectors. Local authorities routinely support parents that need a state-funded school place, including where private schools have closed. Where local authorities are experiencing difficulties in ensuring there are enough school places for children that need them, the department will offer support and advice.

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

The department provides capital funding through the Basic Need grant to support local authorities to provide school places, based on their own pupil forecasts and school capacity data. They can use this funding to provide places in new schools or through expansions of existing schools.

### ■ Schools: Charitable Donations

**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**

[\[22474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the value of charity given to (a) state schools and (b) local communities by independent schools in each of the last five years.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department does not collect data about the value of charity given to state schools and local communities by private schools. Therefore, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has not made an estimate of its value in each of the last five years.

The Independent Schools Council, which represents over 1,400 private schools belonging to an association, publishes an annual report which sets out the support private schools give to schools in the state sector through partnership working and bursaries.

### ■ Schools: Uniforms

**Damian Hinds:**

[\[22897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason a school tie is not permitted as an additional item of branded uniform in primary schools in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

School uniforms play a valuable role in creating a sense of common identity among pupils and reducing visible inequalities, but too many schools require high numbers of branded uniform items, with parents reporting uniforms are their most significant cost of school concern. This government has therefore introduced legislation to limit the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require, to bring down costs for parents and remove barriers from children accessing sport and other school activities. This will give parents more choice in where to purchase uniform and allow them greater flexibility to make the spending decisions that suit their circumstances.

The vast majority of primary schools do not currently require pupils to purchase a branded tie and, as most primary schools already have a lower number of compulsory branded items, this government does not want that number to increase. Primary schools will remain free to require a branded tie, however it will count towards their three branded item limit.

In comparison, most secondary and middle schools already require branded ties, with 82% of secondary schools requiring a tie. Allowing secondary and middle schools an

additional branded tie balances reducing costs for parents with providing those schools with necessary extra flexibility in setting their uniform policies. For example, it allows a secondary school to retain a branded tie and blazer whilst still being able to brand other items across PE kit and daywear, according to their circumstances.

## ■ STEM subjects: Secondary Education

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[23104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has plans to increase funding for STEM education at secondary school level.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

High and rising school standards are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life. The best way of supporting education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects is to ensure high quality teaching in these subjects, by helping schools to recruit and retain good teachers.

The department has therefore announced an Initial Teacher Training financial incentives package for the 2025/26 academic year worth £233 million, a £37 million increase on the last recruitment cycle. This includes a range of measures, including bursaries worth £29,000 tax-free and scholarships worth £31,000 tax-free, to encourage talented trainees in key STEM subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing.

For the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years, the department is also offering a targeted retention incentive worth up to £6,000 after tax for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their careers who choose to work in disadvantaged schools. This will support recruitment and retention of specialist teachers in these subjects and in the schools and areas that need them most.

In the 2025/26 financial year, the government will continue to fund subject continuing professional development (CPD) and other programmes in mathematics, computing and physics. This includes Maths Hubs, which co-ordinate mathematics CPD, and the 'Subject knowledge for physics teachers' programme, an intensive retraining programme for teachers teaching physics out of specialism.

## ■ Students: Finance

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[23823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps she has taken to increase awareness of financial support available to students.

**Janet Daby:**

Information on the student support package for the 2024/25 academic year, is available on GOV.UK at: <https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/currently-a-student/>.



The higher education (HE) sector needs a secure financial footing to face the challenges of the next decade, and to ensure that all students have confidence that they will receive the world-class HE experience they deserve.

In line with this approach, on 4 November 2024, this government announced that from 1 August 2025 it will be increasing both the maximum cap for tuition fees, and maintenance loans for students, in line with inflation.

There is much more to do to expand access and improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. That is why we have announced that we expect the HE sector to do more to support students by working with the government and the Office for Students, and by making the most of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. We will be setting out longer-term plans for the sector next year.

Further information for prospective students is provided on the Student Finance England website, available here: <https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/student-toolkit/>.

The government will announce further details of the student finance package for the 2025/26 academic year soon.

## ■ Teachers: Resignations

**Sir John Hayes:**

**[22250]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will commission a review into the reasons that teachers have left that profession in the last 10 years.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Driving high and rising standards is central to the government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child relies on a highly skilled workforce in schools, with high-quality teaching the in-school factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's education. This is why we are committed to recruiting an additional 6,500 new expert teachers across our schools, both mainstream and specialist, and our colleges over the course of this Parliament to ensure every child has the qualified expert teacher they need.

A successful recruitment strategy starts with a retention strategy, and we continuously review what works best in retaining teachers and the barriers to retention. The department collects data on teachers' and leaders' intention to leave the profession, and reasons for having left, through the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) longitudinal study. The department uses the study's findings to design policies that better support teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders. The study is accessible at the following link: <https://www.workinglivesofteachers.com/>.

The WLTL study findings show that teachers most commonly leave, or consider leaving, the profession due to high workload, followed by stress and/or poor wellbeing. We are committed to working with the sector to address these issues.

The department has made available a range of resources to help address teacher workload and wellbeing. The department's 'improve workload and wellbeing for

school staff' service, developed alongside school leaders, helps schools to cut unnecessary workload. It can be accessed at: <https://improve-workload-and-wellbeing-for-school-staff.education.gov.uk/>. In addition, the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, co-created with the sector, sets out commitments from government, Ofsted, schools, and colleges to protect and promote the wellbeing of staff. Over 3,900 schools and colleges have signed up to the Charter.

The WLTL findings also show that teachers consider leaving, or do leave, due to pressures related to inspection and pupil outcomes. We are introducing a school report card in place of Ofsted single headline grades to deliver more information for parents on the strengths and weaknesses of schools and proportionate accountability for staff. The independent School Teacher Review Body (STRB) suggested that government should consider the removal of performance related pay (PRP) in favour of enabling schools to decide on appropriate forms of appraisal which has been taken forward.

Former teachers surveyed cited dissatisfaction with pay as a reason they left the profession. This government has accepted the STRB's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools from September.

For 2024/25 and 2025/26, the department is also offering a targeted retention incentive worth up to £6,000 after tax for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their careers who choose to work in disadvantaged schools. This will support the retention of specialist teachers in these subjects and in the schools and areas that need them most.

Former teachers also cited a lack of flexible working opportunities as a reason for leaving the profession. The department has published a flexible working toolkit, which includes practical resources to help school leaders implement flexible working and to support school staff to request it. It is accessible here:

<https://www.flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/dfe-toolkit>. These resources have been produced by school leaders and other sector experts, together with the department. We have also clarified that teachers can undertake their planning, preparation and assessment time at home.

## ■ Unemployment: Runcorn and Helsby

**Mike Amesbury:**

**[22974]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of young people not in employment, education or training in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

**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. These statistics are available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief>. The number of 16 to 24 year olds estimated as NEET in England at the end of 2023 was estimated to

be 709,600, representing 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 Runcorn and Helsby constituency 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 age 16 and 17. This data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>.

The data shows that of the 7,263 young people aged 16 and 17 years old who were known to Cheshire West and Chester local authority at the end of 2022, 329 were NEET or their activity was not known. Of the 3,255 young people aged 16 and 17 years old who were known to Halton local authority at the end of 2022, 158 were NEET or their activity was not known. These statistics are published as transparency data so some caution should be taken if using these figures.

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. The latest publication includes destinations in 2022/23 by parliamentary constituency boundaries at that time. Data can be found at parliamentary constituency level here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/819215d3-4c06-40ac-0f95-08dd167ca495>.

## ■ Vocational Guidance

**James McMurdock:**

[22875]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to promote alternatives to university to young people.

**Janet Daby:**

The government is developing a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education and skills, to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce, and drive economic growth through our Industrial Strategy.

We have established Skills England to ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs of the next decade. It will ensure that the skills system is clear and navigable for individuals, for both young people and older adults, strengthening careers pathways into jobs across the economy.

The department will support the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background, where they live and their personal circumstances. However, all young people must have a genuine choice of high-quality further or higher education pathways, or in-work training including apprenticeships, so that young people can follow that pathway that is right for them.

Firstly, the department is promoting apprenticeships which offer a range of high-quality options for young people, with over 700 apprenticeship standards approved for delivery. We actively promote apprenticeships in schools and colleges through our Apprenticeships Support and Knowledge Programme (ASK). Through it, we increase awareness of apprenticeships and Higher Technical Qualifications amongst students in years 10-13, parents, carers, teachers and careers advisers. During the 2023/24 academic year, ASK engaged with 2,366 schools and colleges. The ASK sessions reached over 575,000 students.

In addition, the department is developing new foundation apprenticeships to give more young people a foot in the door at the start of their working lives whilst supporting the pipeline of new talent that employers will need to drive economic growth.

Secondly, the department is introducing a Youth Guarantee, as part of the measures set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper. This will ensure that all young people aged 18-21 in England can access quality training, educational opportunities or help to find work. The Youth Guarantee will involve working closely with Mayoral Authorities, and building on existing provision and entitlements, to test new ways of supporting young people into employment or training. To do this we will mobilise eight place-based Youth Guarantee trailblazers with £45 million of funding in 2025/26.

Thirdly, the department continues to raise awareness amongst young people of alternative options to university, starting from a young age. Secondary schools have legal requirements to provide independent careers guidance and to provide at least six opportunities for providers of technical education or apprenticeships to speak to all pupils. Our government-funded network of Careers Hubs, coordinated by The Careers and Enterprise Company, supports schools and colleges to maximise these opportunities.

The Skills for Life website also sets out the wide range of education and training options available for young people.

Together, these steps ensure that we continue to support all young people to either go to university, or to access high-quality apprenticeships, further education opportunities, and support to find work, depending on the path that is right for them.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Carbon Emissions

**Richard Tice:**

**[23067]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the total expenditure was on achieving net zero targets in each year since 2015 by sector; and what the corresponding estimated total reduction in global emissions was in the same period.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

The Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its analysis of the cost of reaching net zero by 2050 in chapter 3 of the July 2021 edition of its UK Fiscal Risk Report. As the OBR has noted, “the costs of failing to get climate change under control would be much larger than those of bringing emissions down to net zero.

■ **Climate Change****Calum Miller:**[\[24088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with his European counterparts on international climate commitments since 5 November 2024.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

This Government believes that we can only ensure climate security for further generations in the UK if we lead globally. Secretary of State has had a range of engagements with European counterparts on international climate commitments, including at COP29.

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Carbon Emissions****Richard Tice:**[\[23059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much his Department has spent on measures to achieve net zero targets in the last five years.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

The Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its analysis of the cost of reaching net zero by 2050 in chapter 3 of the July 2021 edition of its UK Fiscal Risk Report. As the OBR has noted, “the costs of failing to get climate change under control would be much larger than those of bringing emissions down to net zero.” Spending Review 2021 set out £26 billion of public capital investment in net zero over four years across Government.

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Disclosure of Information****Claire Coutinho:**[\[23882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Energy in response to the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan during the Oral Statement of 13 January on Gas Storage Levels, Official Report, column 32, if he will publish details of the meetings the Minister for Energy has had with oil and gas companies in Aberdeen since July 2024.

**Michael Shanks:**

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

Published declarations include the purpose of the meeting and the names of any additional external organisations or individuals in attendance.

## ■ Drax Power Station

**Lee Anderson:** [\[22981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the sustainability of energy produced by Drax power station in the last 12 years.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government supports biomass as a low carbon source of energy only where relevant sustainability criteria are met. Drax must demonstrate compliance with these criteria to Ofgem as the independent regulator. Evidence provided is independently audited. Ofgem recently published their conclusions on an investigation into Drax's compliance with sustainability standards on 29 August 2024. The investigation found that whilst Drax complied with the standards, it failed to report data accurately. Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations and the size of Drax's redress payment, £25m, underscores the robustness of the regulatory system.

## ■ Heat Pumps: Finance

**Richard Tice:** [\[23052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people who received grants for heat source pumps under (a) the Green Homes Grant and (b) similar schemes are supported when systems prove unfit for purpose and the installation company goes into liquidation.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme required that consumers seek advice from a suitably qualified TrustMark registered installer before they applied for a voucher. It also required that installations meet Publicly Available Standard (PAS) 2035.

If a homeowner believes that any installation work carried out in their home under a Government scheme is faulty, they should first contact the installer. Where the installer has failed to adequately resolve the issue or have ceased trading, they may refer to TrustMark's website which contains further guidance on steps consumers can take if things go wrong and the dispute resolution process: (<https://www.trustmark.org.uk/homeowner/support/complaints-process>).

## ■ Renewable Energy

**Richard Tice:** [\[23068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the annual subsidy is for renewable energy projects; and what the average increase in consumer energy bills was in each of the last five years.

**Michael Shanks:**

This data is published by the Office for Budgetary Responsibility and Ofgem.

Renewables provide energy security by reducing our exposure to gas price volatility, as well as providing significant savings for those households and businesses directly benefitting from small-scale renewable measures, such as solar panels.

### ■ Renewable Energy: Business

**Connor Naismith:** [\[23085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans his Department has to ensure that (a) commercial and (b) retail units utilise (i) solar panels and (ii) other renewable energy sources.

**Michael Shanks:**

Future building standards this year will set new homes and buildings on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuel markets and ensures they are fit for a net zero future.

Changes have been introduced to permitted development rights, enabling more solar installations to benefit from these flexibilities and planning freedoms.

The Government will assess the potential to drive the construction of solar canopies on outdoor car parks over a certain size through a call for evidence this year.

### ■ Renewable Energy: USA

**Calum Miller:** [\[24085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of US policies in relation to renewable energy between 20 January 2017 and 20 January 2021 on the UK's renewable energy commitments.

**Michael Shanks:**

*BEIS has, and DESNZ continues to, assess the implications of international policy on the UK. The Department works on the basis of its legislative commitment to combating climate change and meeting the UK's Carbon Budgets*

### ■ Warm Homes Plan: Runcorn and Helsby

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[22975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to roll out the Warm Homes Plan to Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Warm Homes Plan will help people find ways to save money on energy bills and transform our ageing building stock into comfortable, low-carbon homes that are fit for the future. Further details on the Warm Homes Plan will be set out later this year following the conclusion of the Spending Review.

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****■ Air Pollution**

**Siân Berry:** [\[23100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 7788 on Air Pollution, if his Department will take steps to amend clean air targets to bring the UK in line with the European Union's Ambient Air Quality Directive.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Government is committed to cleaning up our air and protecting the public from the harm of pollution. We recognise the importance of ambitious yet achievable air quality targets, supported by robust delivery plans, which is why the Government has launched a rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan to revise our plan for significantly improving the environment including for air quality.

**■ Allotments**

**Karl Turner:** [\[9918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to (a) review and (b) amend the Allotments Act 1950 to strengthen the rights of allotment tenants.

**Karl Turner:** [\[9919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) ensure the accessibility of allotments for members of the community and (b) support local authorities in (i) improving facilities and (ii) ensuring inclusive access; and whether he has made an assessment of trends in the level of demand for allotment spaces.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra is not currently taking any such steps. Allotments policy is a matter for local Government.

**■ Arable Farming: Weather**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[22958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help mitigate the impact of (a) increased rainfall and (b) storms on arable farm output.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[22959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support farm businesses to adapt to adverse weather conditions.



**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government inherited flood assets in their worst condition on record following years of underinvestment by the previous Government – only 92% of the Environment Agency's 38,000 high consequence assets are currently at required condition.

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion over 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by building, maintaining, and repairing flood defences. The Government also announced an additional £50 million of investment into internal drainage boards, supporting farmers and rural communities from the impacts of flooding.

The new Flood Resilience Taskforce provides oversight of national and local flood resilience and preparedness ahead of and after the winter flood season.

Additionally, Defra's farming budget will be £2.4 billion in 2025/26. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes.

This funding will deliver improvements to cover a range of objectives including support to improve resilience to flooding.

**■ Biodiversity: British Overseas Territories****Barry Gardiner:**[\[23707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what percentage of his Department's total biodiversity budget was spent on supporting biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories in 2024-05.

**Mary Creagh:**

UK Government biodiversity spend is across multiple organisations and this funding contributes to other objectives, such as water quality, net zero and food security. As such it is not possible to provide an exact figure of total domestic expenditure on biodiversity.

For 2024-25, the department has committed to make available up to £10 million in direct support for biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories. Future funding will be subject to the outcomes of spending review and business planning processes.

**■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Industrial Disputes****Nick Timothy:**[\[23028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

There are no current industrial disputes ongoing within Defra or its arm's length bodies.

**■ National Parks****Satvir Kaur:**[\[23083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the (a) number and (b) size of (i) national parks and (ii) national park cities.

**Mary Creagh:**

Natural England is the statutory authority responsible for designating National Parks and National Landscapes/Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England.

Natural England have undertaken early exploratory work to consider possible approaches to the designation of a new National Park in England. They currently do not have a timeline for progressing this work which is subject to on-going discussions and are not considering any additional landscape designation cases at the current time.

Natural England is not responsible for National Park Cities. The National Park City Foundation (a registered charity) is the steward of the global movement supporting cities all around the world in their aspiration of becoming National Park Cities. The Foundation has provided guidance for prospective National Park Cities including how to register local campaigns and submit applications. The Foundation states that they are on course for at least twenty five global National Park Cities by 2025.

**■ Water Restoration Fund****Caroline Voaden:**[\[23625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is for announcing the outcome of bids submitted to the Water Restoration Fund in spring 2024.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Water Restoration Fund, which launched in April 2024, was established to reinvest water company environmental fines and penalties into projects to improve the water environment. Defra is continuing to work with His Majesty's Treasury regarding continued reinvestment of the water company fines and penalties on water environment improvement.

**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE****■ Afghanistan: Humanitarian Aid****Priti Patel:**[\[22595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to provide humanitarian (a) assistance and (b) aid to Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is taking a leading role in the humanitarian response to the people of Afghanistan and has provided over 2.7 million people with humanitarian assistance in financial year 2023/24. The FCDO is planning £161 million of funding to Afghanistan this financial year (2024/25) which includes both humanitarian aid and support for essential services. All funding is provided directly to implementing partners such as UN organisations, the Red Cross and NGOs, and we remain committed that at least 50 percent of people reached are women and girls. We are focused on supporting both emergency relief and strengthening the capacity of Afghan communities.

**■ Afghanistan: Women****Tim Roca:**[\[22500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of supporting charities that support pregnant women and newborn babies in Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is committed to supporting vital health services in Afghanistan, including for pregnant women and newborn babies. Our £161 million aid programme provides support to the most vulnerable, delivered through non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, and the Red Cross Movement. In 2023/24 the UK helped more than 1.4 million people, of whom over 1 million were women, to access essential health services, and we reached at least 57,000 children under 5 and pregnant and lactating women with dietary supplements.

**Priti Patel:**[\[22597\]](#)

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 decision by the Taliban to prohibit women and girls from undertaking midwifery and nursing courses in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is deeply concerned at reports of a ban on women accessing medical training in Afghanistan, including midwifery education. We have released a statement strongly condemning 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 are working closely with partners to assess the mid to long-term effects. We continue to press the Taliban on all human rights abuses in Afghanistan.

### ■ **Afghanistan: Women's Rights**

**Priti Patel:** [\[22596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking with his international counterparts to promote the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We have repeatedly condemned Taliban restrictions on women and girls' rights, including through UN Security Council and Human Rights Council resolutions and, most recently, at a G7+ meeting of Special Representatives in Geneva on 16 December. As the Foreign Secretary has said, exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is a tragic setback for Afghanistan. Officials from the Doha-based UK Mission to Afghanistan continue to press Taliban acting ministers and Afghan officials on human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including the most recent ban on female medical education. We are committed that at least 50 percent of people reached by our £161 million aid programme in Afghanistan will be women and girls.

### ■ **Armed Conflict: Explosives**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[23820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken with (a) international counterparts and (b) the Secretary of State for Defence to remove explosive ordnance from areas that have previously been conflict zones.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The FCDO-funded Global Mine Action Programme (GMAP) is the Government's main programme for removing mines, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance from previous conflict zones. GMAP currently funds clearance in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Laos, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe. The Integrated Security Fund also funds clearance in Sri Lanka and Tajikistan. In October 2024, the UK participated in a Ukraine mine action conference, that re-affirmed donor commitment to supporting Ukraine's national mine action strategy. In November 2024, the UK participated in the 5th Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Clearing legacy contamination is outside the remit of Ministry of Defence.

### ■ **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement**

**Barry Gardiner:** [\[22880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19633 on the Biodiversity

Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement, what recent assessment he has made of the extent to which primary legislation will be required before ratification.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Government is completely committed to ratification of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement, also known as the "High Seas Treaty" or "Global Oceans Treaty"), which is in line with our determination to reinvigorate the UK's wider international leadership on climate and nature. Work is in hand on the measures needed to implement the detailed and complex provisions of the Agreement before the UK can ratify.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

**Wendy Morton:**

[22625]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for the treaty on the British Indian Ocean Territory of his recent discussions with his counterpart in Mauritius.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Discussions between the UK and Mauritius on the future exercise of sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory remain ongoing. It is not appropriate to provide a running commentary on those discussions. We will continue to work closely with Mauritius to conclude a deal that is in both sides' shared interests.

**Wendy Morton:**

[22627]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on a treaty with Mauritius on the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Stephen Doughty:**

I have had regular discussions with Ministerial colleagues on issues related to a treaty with Mauritius on the British Indian Ocean Territory. HM Government remains committed to reaching an agreement with Mauritius in the best interests of both parties.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Dengue Fever**

**Wendy Morton:**

[22279]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect UK nationals in Europe from Dengue.

**Stephen Doughty:**

FCDO Travel Advice provides information to British nationals travelling overseas, including any health risks. Country Travel Advice pages link to the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC)'s Travel Health Pro website [<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>], which offers comprehensive health advice

and country-specific advice to travellers on a full range of health issues, including dengue where appropriate. NaTHNaC is commissioned by the UK Health Security Agency to provide travel health advice to the British public. Travel Advice pages are kept under regular review.

#### ■ **British Nationals Abroad: Detainees**

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 19318 on British Nationals Abroad: Detainees, whether he has made changes to his Department's (a) processes and (b) services in respect of supporting British nationals abroad since July 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The government is committed to strengthening consular services, including through introduction of a right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations and the appointment of an envoy. My department is considering a package of measures to achieve this, which we will announce in due course. The FCDO continuously reviews its processes to provide better service for those who require consular assistance, including through feedback, insight and lessons learned. Recently we have introduced an improved service to book appointments and a new FCDO digital triage AI tool which provides British nationals quick, efficient responses to their questions online.

#### ■ **Democratic Republic of the Congo: Human Rights**

**Sarah Owen:** [\[R\] \[23439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with Rwandan counterparts on (a) human rights abuses and (b) violence against women and girls by militia groups in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK is closely monitoring the situation in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and continues to raise our concerns about reported human rights violations at the highest levels with the Governments of Rwanda and DRC, most lately by the British High Commissioner on the 13 January. The Minister for Africa also spoke with the Rwandan Foreign Minister on 9 January to emphasise the UK's concern at the recent escalation of violence in eastern DRC and ongoing violations of the current ceasefire agreement by armed groups, including M23.

As a member of the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, the UK is especially concerned by the continuing high rates of violence against women and girls in eastern DRC. We continue to encourage the Governments of Rwanda and DRC to re-commit meaningfully to the Luanda regional peace process and deliver lasting protection for civilians, including those in particularly vulnerable communities.

## ■ Developing Countries: Vaccination

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

[\[22581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy to use evidence-based, responsive vaccination programmes around the world.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK supports evidence-based responsive vaccination programmes as part of our dedication to improving global health. The UK is one of the largest donors to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which has vaccinated over a billion children. Gavi's vaccination programmes are guided by the latest scientific evidence and expert advice from the World Health Organisation's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE), coupled with in-depth, evidence-based analysis to ensure the effectiveness of its vaccination programmes.

## ■ Development Aid: Asylum Hotels

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[22629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking with (a) the Secretary of State for the Home Department and (b) other Cabinet colleagues to reduce the amount of Overseas Development Assistance spent on asylum hotels.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Home Secretary is committed to ensuring asylum costs fall and has already taken measures to reduce the backlog and will end the use of expensive hotel accommodation. We expect these plans to create more space in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget to spend on our international development priorities overseas. In-donor refugee costs will be published in the provisional Statistics on International Development publication in Spring 2025. The first meeting of the re-established ODA Board, chaired by me and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, will focus on in-donor refugee costs.

## ■ East Africa: Foreign Relations

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[22441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness, (b) potential and (c) adequacy of relations between the UK and East Africa.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

East Africa and the UK have strong people-to-people ties, vital trading relations, critical security partnerships, and British institutions such as the BBC are hugely popular. We have a significant Official Development Assistance (ODA) portfolio - in October 2024, Lord Collins visited Ethiopia, where he announced £16m in funding to support the Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme, and Seychelles, to sign an ambitious economic security partnership on illicit finance. As penholder on Somalia at

the UN Security Council, we delivered a mandate for the new African Union Stabilisation and Support Mission. With sufficient stability, East Africa has potential for greater commercial cooperation with UK and the new Africa approach will set out a distinctive UK offer which addresses shared interests and strengthens partnerships.

## ■ Nigeria: Religious Freedom

**James MacCleary:**

[\[23658\]](#)

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 reported killings of religious minorities in Nigeria; and what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help ensure freedom of religion and belief in that country.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK champions Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all in Nigeria and beyond. No one should live in fear because of what they do, or do not believe in. We work to uphold the right to FoRB through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora and we regularly raise FoRB bilaterally with the Nigerian Government. The UK Government is committed to supporting Nigeria to address ongoing security challenges, including violent extremism and intercommunal violence, which continue to impinge on the rights of Nigerians to FoRB. This includes financial support to programmes which strengthen mechanisms to resolve conflict and build resilience in affected communities. Through our UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership, we also engage with Nigerian security actors to address these complex issues.

## ■ North Africa: Foreign Relations

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[22440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness, (b) potential and (c) adequacy of relations between the UK and North Africa.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The relationship between the UK and the countries of North Africa focuses on a range of shared interests, including trade and investment, working together on migration, regional stability, and people-to-people links. There is greater potential, including to increase trade from £11bn, and to meet demand for greater English language capacity. We are working to develop comprehensive partnerships to tackle irregular migration and have regular dialogues on regional stability, such as the importance of tackling Russian efforts to increase its presence in the region and aligning efforts to address the conflicts of the Sahel and wider Middle East.



## ■ Paradise Golf and Beach Resort

**John Milne:** [\[22514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Moroccan counterpart on the potential merits of a compensation scheme for UK citizens that lost their investments in the Paradise Golf and Beach Resort project; and whether he has taken other steps to help ensure adequate (a) financial and (b) other compensation for those affected.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office remains committed to helping all British investors affected by the failure of the Paradise Golf & Beach Resort (PGBR) development and will continue in its efforts to work with the Moroccan authorities to help them receive the compensation to which they are entitled. His Majesty's Ambassador to Rabat continues to seek opportunities to raise PGBR with his counterparts and relevant stakeholders in Morocco to encourage a satisfactory resolution to this longstanding issue. FCDO officials in London continue to raise the issue with their counterparts in the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco.

## ■ Red Sea: British Nationals Abroad

**Wendy Morton:** [\[23137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of UK nationals in countries bordering the Red Sea.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office does not hold this information; the UK Government does not require British nationals to register with the nearest British Embassy or Consulate when overseas.

## ■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what proportion of UK humanitarian aid to Sudan is spent in-country.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

100% of our bilateral humanitarian ODA allocation to Sudan is spent in Sudan.

In addition, the UK has provided many tens of millions of pounds of humanitarian assistance this year to people who have fled Sudan to elsewhere in the region such as Chad and South Sudan.

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what percentage of humanitarian aid spending on Sudan was spent on refugees outside of Sudan in the last 12 months.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

100 per cent of our bilateral humanitarian ODA allocation to Sudan is spent in Sudan.

Additionally, the UK continues to provide significant support to those fleeing Sudan, most recently with the Foreign Secretary announcing a major aid increase on 17 November to support people affected by the conflict, including in neighbouring countries, such as Chad and South Sudan.

**Wendy Morton:**[\[22622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 2 January 2025 to Question 18873 on Sudan: Humanitarian Aid, what potential alternative cross-border routes beyond Adré for humanitarian aid delivery into Sudan he has identified.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK continues to push for additional aid routes into Sudan, including through Aweil, Renk and Panakuach, as well as Adré, to facilitate aid deliveries, particularly into areas held by the Rapid Support Forces, and for routes to be free of bureaucratic and administrative impediments. In addition, the UK continues to press for improved cross-line routes, including into Khartoum.

**Wendy Morton:**[\[22623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 2 January 2025 to Question 18873 on Sudan: Humanitarian Aid, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Sierra Leone following the Russian veto of the UN Security Council Resolution on protecting civilians.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Foreign Secretary spoke with his Sierra Leonean counterpart on 9 January. During their discussion, the UK and Sierra Leone agreed on the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict in Sudan to prevent more needless civilian deaths and a further spread of famine. We continue to work closely with the UN, regional stakeholders, and Council members, including Sierra Leone, to ensure the Council continues to support efforts towards peace in Sudan.

**Wendy Morton:**[\[22624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 2 January 2025 to Question 18873 on Sudan: Humanitarian Aid, what steps he is taking to ensure the protection of civilians.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

On 11 October 2023, the Human Rights Council adopted the UK-led 'Sudan Core Group' resolution to establish an independent and international Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to ensure the credible allegations of human rights violations and abuses by all sides are investigated impartially. The UK led lobbying for the renewal of the FFM mandate in October, which passed with an increased vote margin and support from two African states. The UK strongly supports the International Criminal Court's active investigation into the situation in Darfur, including allegations of crimes committed

since April 2023. This support has included the secondment of expert investigators to support the ICC's work in several countries.

The UK is also funding the Sudan Witness project delivered by the Centre for Information Resilience, which gathers open-source evidence on harms against civilians and civilian infrastructure, with a view to future accountability efforts. As penholder on Sudan at the UN Security Council, the UK co-led a protection of civilians resolution on Sudan with Sierra Leone in November, which was cynically vetoed by Russia. We continue to work with the UN, key regional stakeholders and Council members to ensure the Council continues to act in support of peace in Sudan.

### ■ **Syria: Humanitarian Aid**

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[22618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 24 December 2024 to Question 19307 on Syria: Humanitarian Aid, what assessment he has made of (a) the impact of the situation on civilians in Syria, (b) the need for humanitarian aid in Syria and (c) the best way to respond to the humanitarian situation.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Fourteen years of conflict in Syria has significantly impacted civilians, with over 16 million people needing urgent humanitarian assistance and 13 million people displaced. In response to recent events, humanitarian agencies have rapidly scaled up the ongoing international aid effort in Syria. The UK announced an additional £61 million to support this.

Flexible humanitarian funding, strengthened co-ordination, and an updated assessment of needs are key for responding effectively. Unimpeded access, free from political interference or targeting of humanitarian workers, is essential to deliver assistance to those in need across Syria. We continue to advocate for this.

### ■ **USA: Diplomatic Service**

**Calum Miller:**

[\[24087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the US Ambassador on comments about Ministers by members of the incoming US Administration.

**Stephen Doughty:**

We thank US Ambassador Jane Hartley for her years of service to furthering the UK-US relationship before her departure from the UK. The Foreign Secretary last met with the Ambassador on 5 December. They discussed a range of issues relating to the UK-US relationship.

## ■ Western Sahara: Politics and Government

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[22594\]](#)

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 Western Sahara of Morocco's autonomy plan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK continues to support UN-led efforts to reach a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The UK strongly supports the work of Staffan de Mistura, Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara, and continues to encourage constructive engagement with the UN political process. The UK believes this process is the best way to solve the long-standing dispute by delivering a solution agreeable to all parties, one which would contribute significantly to regional security and prosperity.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Epsom and Ewell

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[23689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the waiting time for Emergency Care in Epsom and Ewell constituency.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises the pressures on the National Health Service during the winter period and the impact this is having on waiting times for emergency care, including in Epsom and Ewell.

We are committed to supporting the NHS to improve performance and achieve the standards set out in the NHS Constitution, but we must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

However, we are determined to turn things around through investment and reform. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £25.6 billion of additional healthcare funding over the next two years, and we will set out an urgent and emergency care improvement plan shortly, as well as a 10-Year Health Plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

### ■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Kent

**Sojan Joseph:**

[\[24029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce accident and emergency waiting times in hospitals in East Kent.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises the pressures on the National Health Service during the winter period and the impact this is having on accident and emergency waiting times, including in hospitals in East Kent.

We are committed to supporting the NHS to improve performance and achieve the standards set out in the NHS Constitution but must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

However, we are determined to turn things around through investment and reform. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £25.6 billion of additional healthcare funding over the next two years, and we will set out an urgent and emergency care improvement plan shortly, as well as a 10-Year Health Plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

■ **Ambulance Services: Private Sector****Mike Martin:**[\[23634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that private ambulance service personnel on NHS contracts receive (a) recognition and (b) honours.

**Karin Smyth:**

Under the honours system of the United Kingdom, anyone can receive an award, and anyone can nominate someone if they demonstrate the exceptional contribution the person has made.

Recognition for those working in the private sector is primarily a matter for their employers.

■ **Ambulance Services: Standards****Steve Darling:**[\[23528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time is for (a) ambulances held in queues and (b) people waiting at home for an ambulance.

**Karin Smyth:**

The national average ambulance handover time was 43 minutes and 32 seconds in December 2024. The following table shows the national ambulance response time, including for people who have called for an ambulance from their home, for Category 1, 2, 3, and 4 incidents, in hours, minutes and seconds:

CATEGORY OF INCIDENT	DECEMBER 2024 NATIONAL AVERAGE	NHS CONSTITUTION STANDARD
Category 1 average response time	00:08:40	00:07:00
Category 1 90th centile	00:15:25	00:15:00

CATEGORY OF INCIDENT	DECEMBER 2024 NATIONAL AVERAGE	NHS CONSTITUTION STANDARD
response time		
Category 2 average response time	00:47:26	00:18:00
Category 2 90th centile response time	01:41:40	00:40:00
Category 3 90th centile response time	07:21:03	02:00:00
Category 4 90th centile response time	08:15:44	03:00:00

Source: NHS England Ambulance Quality Indicators, which is available at the following link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ambulance-quality-indicators/>

**Steve Darling:**

[\[23529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce ambulance waiting times (a) in the A&E queue and (b) for Torbay and South Devon NHS foundation trust.

**Karin Smyth:**

Ambulance response times and ambulance handover times have been below the high standards that patients should expect in recent years, including at the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundational Trust.

The Government has committed to supporting the National Health Service to improve performance and achieve the standards set out in the NHS Constitution, including ambulance response times, but we must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

We are determined to turn things around through investment and reform. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £25.6 billion of additional healthcare funding over the next two years, and we will set out a 10-Year Health Plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

■ **Ambulance Services: Vehicles**

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[23520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason ambulance services must sign up to a maintenance package in order to reclaim VAT in relation to the leasing of vehicles.

**Karin Smyth:**

Requirements for reclaiming value added tax are set by HM Revenue and Customs. Guidance on the approach for the Government and the health bodies, including ambulance services, for contracted out services is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/vat-government-and-public-bodies/vatgpb9720>

**■ Apricity Fertility: Closures****Dame Caroline Dinenege:****[23305]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Agency on the closure of the Apricity business.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) advised the Department about the closure of the on-line service for fertility patients, Apricity, on 24 December 2024. The Apricity service did not fall under the HFEA's current regulatory remit as it offered advice, diagnostic testing and prescribing but did not offer fertility treatment services directly. No discussions have therefore been held.

**■ Autism: Diagnosis****Mike Martin:****[23631]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time was for an autism diagnosis in Kent in (a) 2025 and (b) 2020; and what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times for receiving an autism diagnosis.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 17 January 2025]:* The information is not held centrally in the format requested, but may be held by individual providers or integrated care boards (ICBs). Some relevant information is available on autism assessment waiting times for the NHS Kent and Medway ICB.

In the NHS Kent and Medway ICB, the Autism Waiting Time Statistics published by NHS England show that there were a total of 8,695 patients with an open suspected autism referral in September 2024, the latest available data, and a total of 3,015 patients with an open suspected autism referral in September 2020. The median waiting time of all patients in this ICB with an open suspected autism referral, where their first care contact was in the quarter, was 483 days in September 2024, and 139 days in September 2020.

Data on children and young people in this dataset is expected to be an underestimate and caution should be used when interpreting these statistics since they are experimental rather than official statistics.

It is the responsibility of ICBs to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including autism assessments and

diagnosis, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

### ■ **Cancer and Radiology: Training**

**John McDonnell:** [\[23252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will include an expansion of (a) radiology and (b) oncology speciality training places in the next iteration of the Long Term Workforce Plan.

**John McDonnell:** [\[23254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to increase speciality training places in (a) radiology and (b) oncology.

**Karin Smyth:**

We are committed to training the staff we need, including radiologists and oncologists, to ensure patients are cared for by the right professional, when and where they need it.

We will ensure that the number of medical specialty training places meets the demands of the National Health Service in the future. NHS England will work with stakeholders to ensure that any growth is sustainable and focused in the service areas where need is greatest.

This summer we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, and treat patients on time again. We will set out next steps in due course.

### ■ **Day Care Services: Disability**

**Leigh Ingham:** [\[23676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of regulating companies that are funded by local government to provide day activity services to adults with disabilities.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care in England. The CQC has powers under the Health and Care Act 2008 to regulate adult social care services to make sure they provide safe, effective, compassionate, and high-quality care. Where concerns on quality or safety are identified, the CQC uses the regulatory and enforcement powers it has available, and will take action to ensure the safety of people drawing on care and support.

Day activity centres, in which social, recreational, and care services may be provided to older people or those with a disability, are not currently within the scope of the CQC's regulation, as set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014.



Any changes to those regulations would be subject to the usual Parliamentary process, which would include a public consultation, and thus an opportunity to consider the merits of further regulation of services.

### ■ Dentistry: East of England

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:**

[\[23591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many dentists have been recruited under the Dental recruitment incentive scheme in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) the East of England.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Within the Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB), three dentists have been recruited, although none of these are within the Suffolk coastal constituency. In the East of England in total, 11 dentists have been recruited under the dental recruitment scheme. The ICBs continue to work with practices in their area to support recruitment to these posts.

This recruitment incentive will see up to 240 dentists receiving payments of £20,000 to work in those areas that need them most, for three years.

### ■ Disability: Social Services

**Richard Burgon:**

[\[23360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure (a) adequate and (b) sustainable funding for (i) social care and (ii) disability care services.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

To enable local authorities to provide vital services such as adult social care, the Government is making up to £3.7 billion of additional funding available for social care authorities in 2025/26, which includes an £880 million increase in the Social Care Grant, which can be used to address the range of pressures facing the adult social care sector. This is alongside an £86 million uplift to the Disabled Facilities Grant to support an approximate additional 7,800 adaptations to homes for those with social care needs, to reduce hospitalisations and prolong independence.

Local authorities are best placed to understand and plan for the needs of their population, and are responsible for how they use the available funding to fulfil their duties under the Care Act (2014).

We are launching an independent commission into adult social care as part of our critical first steps towards delivering a National Care Service. The commission is expected to begin in April 2025.

The commission will be comprehensive and will build on the expert proposals of other reviews, including that of Sir Andrew Dilnot, into care funding and support. It will be broader and wider than ever before, asking essential questions about the shape and

future of the social care sector, including what long-term and sustainable funding solutions should look like.

## ■ Drugs: Shortages

**Layla Moran:**

[\[23425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to issue Severe Shortage Protocols for (a) methylphenidate, (b) dexamfetamine, (c) atomoxetine, (d) lisdexamfetamine, (e) guanfacine, (f) oestrogel, (g) bupropion and (h) lamotrigine.

**Karin Smyth:**

Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) enable community pharmacists to supply a specified medicine or device in accordance with a protocol rather than a prescription, with the patient's consent, and without needing to seek authorisation from the prescriber. SSPs are additional tools that have been used in recent years, alongside a range of other mechanisms, to manage and mitigate medicine and medical devices shortages. SSPs are not introduced unless sufficient supplies of the alternative product to be supplied in accordance with the SSP are available to support the market.

Furthermore, SSPs are not suitable for all medicines and patients. For example, patients with complex health needs may not be considered suitable for a supply in accordance with an SSP. In these cases, patients would always be referred back to the prescriber for any decision about their treatment before any therapeutic or generic alternative is supplied. SSPs are not issued for controlled drugs in Schedule II, such as methylphenidate, except under very restricted circumstances.

The Department is aware of a supply issue affecting methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets. These supply issues are taking longer to resolve than the Department originally anticipated, and the Department is working with the respective suppliers to further improve the United Kingdom's supply for the short and long-term as soon as possible. There are no plans to issue a SSP for methylphenidate.

The Department is currently unaware of any medicine supply issues affecting dexamfetamine, atomoxetine, lisdexamfetamine, guanfacine, oestrogel, bupropionand, lamotrigine. Therefore, there are no plans to issue SSPs for these medicines.

## ■ Endometriosis

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[24057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that all healthcare professionals have adequate training and awareness of endometriosis.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to prioritising women's health and improving the diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care for gynaecological conditions including

endometriosis. Several measures are in place to raise awareness of endometriosis among clinicians and support diagnosis and care.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines support healthcare professionals to diagnose and treat conditions. In November 2024, NICE published updated recommendations on the diagnosis, management and treatment of endometriosis. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng73>

Endometriosis is included in the core curriculum for general practitioners, and for obstetricians and gynaecologists. The General Medical Council is introducing the Medical Licensing Assessment for most incoming doctors, including all medical students graduating from academic year 2024/25 and onwards. Within this assessment are several topics relating to women's health, including endometriosis. This will encourage a better understanding of endometriosis among doctors as they start their careers in the United Kingdom.

We will continue to keep opportunities for training and further awareness raising about endometriosis under review.

#### ■ Fertility: Health Services

**Dame Caroline Dinenge:** [\[23306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to update existing regulations in the fertility industry.

**Dame Caroline Dinenge:** [\[23307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing regulation of the fertility industry.

#### **Karin Smyth:**

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) published Modernising Fertility Law in November 2023, its recommendations for updating the regulatory framework in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health met with the HFEA Chair on 30 July 2024 to discuss these proposals and asked for the key issues to be prioritised.

The Government is currently considering this latest advice from the HFEA about the priority issues for law reform covering their regulatory powers.

#### ■ Health Services and Social Services: Staff

**Richard Burgon:** [\[23361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that disabled people employed in the health and social care sector are afforded (a) reasonable adjustments, (b) support in the workplace and (c) other employment rights.

**Karin Smyth:**

All health and social care employers are expected to comply with employment legislation such as the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Equality Act 2010, which includes considerations for reasonable adjustments. Most social care workers are employed by private sector providers who set their pay, and terms and conditions, including any occupational health or wellbeing support, independent of the Government.

NHS Employers and Skills for Care provide comprehensive guidance to help employers in health and social care understand their legal obligations and how best to support employees with disabilities to have the best working experience possible.

Since 2019, NHS England has published the NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) which sets out metrics to enable organisations to understand the experiences of disabled staff. National Health Service trusts are required to report each year and publish a WDES annual report, which includes local data and an action plan.

**Health Services: Ashfield and Mansfield****Lee Anderson:**[\[23169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve access to (a) healthcare services, (b) GPs and (c) mental health support in (i) Ashfield and (ii) Mansfield constituencies.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Since June 2022, the 42 integrated care boards (ICBs) across England have been responsible for arranging National Health Service healthcare services that meet the clinical needs of their respective populations, with the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB being responsible for the Ashfield and Mansfield constituencies.

However, we know that patients are struggling to see a general practitioner (GP) and we are committed to improving access to GP appointments across the country, including in the Ashfield and Mansfield constituencies. That's why, in October 2024, we provided an £82 million boost to the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, enabling the recruitment of 1,000 newly qualified GPs across England. This will increase the number of GPs employed and the number of appointments delivered in GPs, benefitting thousands of patients that are struggling to receive the care they desperately deserve. Additionally, we have announced a proposed £889 million uplift to the GP Contract for 2025/26, the largest uplift in years, with a rising share of total NHS resources going to GPs. We are currently consulting the profession on key proposals to improve access, continuity of care, and GP recruitment.

We recognise that many people in the Ashfield and Mansfield constituencies are not getting the mental health support or care they need. As part of our mission to build an NHS that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, the Government will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers nationally to reduce wait times and provide faster treatment. We will also provide access to a specialist mental

health professional in every school in England, roll out Young Futures hubs in every community, and modernise the Mental Health Act.

### ■ Health Services: Asylum

**Nick Timothy:** [\[23519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance his Department issues to NHS England on extending the legal duty to provide care for asylum seekers to individuals with rejected asylum applications; and whether that guidance is mandatory.

**Karin Smyth:**

Guidance for the National Health Service has been published, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide>

The guidance underlines the need for NHS bodies to act in line with the relevant legislation. This includes legislation determining the circumstances under which an individual may continue to be exempt from NHS charges for care when an asylum application has been rejected.

### ■ Health Services: Havering

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[23282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to visit healthcare facilities in the (a) London Borough of Havering and (b) surrounding area in the next six months.

**Karin Smyth:**

Ministers regularly consider visits across the country to see the impact of their policy areas. Any plans to visit specific locations will be notified to the relevant Members of Parliament in advance.

### ■ Health Services: Heywood and Middleton North

**Mrs Elsie Blundell:** [\[23947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board on steps to reduce the number of patients awaiting treatment in Heywood and Middleton North constituency.

**Karin Smyth:**

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are accountable to NHS England. The NHS Oversight Framework outlines NHS England's approach to overseeing and monitoring ICB performance, and NHS England regional teams have regular review meetings with ICBs, the frequency of which will vary according to the governance arrangements, but they should be at least quarterly.

More broadly, the Government is working to reduce the number of patients awaiting treatment across the country, including those in Heywood and Middleton North. The Elective Reform Plan, launched as part of the Government's Plan for Change, sets

out how we will get back to the NHS Constitutional Standard, that 92% of patients wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment (RTT) by the end of this Parliament, and will also ensure patients have the best possible experience of care.

We have set an ambition for 2025/26 that we reach 65% of patients waiting no longer than 18 weeks nationally, and for all trusts to deliver a minimum 5% improvement by March 2026. We will also publish minimum standards of care that patients can expect to experience, and will make digital improvements, including to the NHS App, to provide patients with greater choice, control, and flexibility.

Across the country, dedicated and protected surgical hubs are transforming the way the National Health Service provides elective care, by focussing on high volume low complexity surgeries. In the Heywood and Middleton North constituency, there are two such surgical hubs serving patients, the Fairfield General Hospital Elective Surgical Hub, and the Rochdale Infirmary Elective Surgical Hub.

### ■ Health Services: Standards

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[\[23396\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the (a) efficacy and (b) efficiency of NHS Pathways.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is taking action to improve the efficacy and efficiency of NHS Pathways across the health system.

The NHS Pathways clinical content and assessment protocols are consistent with the latest advice from the respected bodies that provide evidence and guidance for medical practice. In particular, NHS Pathways is concordant with the latest guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, the UK Resuscitation Council, and the UK Sepsis Trust.

The NHS Pathways Clinical Decision Support System (CDSS) is a triage product used to support urgent and emergency care in England, and is embedded in NHS 111 and 999 telephony service, and NHS 111 online. It is continuously reviewed to ensure it remains safe, effective, and efficient. The system is developed and maintained by a group of experienced National Health Service clinicians with an urgent and emergency care background. The safety of the clinical triage process is overseen by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and the relevant royal colleges, and clinical professional groups endorse and approve the CDSS.

The NHS triages patients waiting for elective care, including surgeries, through clinical prioritisation, ensuring the order in which patients are seen reflects clinical judgement on need as well as taking into account overall wait time.

The Government is taking action to improve efficacy and efficiency of NHS Pathways across the health system. The recently published Elective Reform Plan commits to reforming outpatient care through clinical pathway transformation. Reform will include doing more activity in the community and increasing the opportunities for patients to

be referred straight to diagnostic tests without the need to first see a consultant, reducing unnecessary follow-up appointments and freeing up clinical time for those who need it most. The Elective Reform Plan also makes changes to advice and guidance to support more patients being cared for outside of hospitals, avoiding 800,000 unnecessary referrals each year.

## ■ **Hormone Replacement Therapy: Greater London**

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[\[23335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the supply of HRT products in London.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department monitors and manages medicine supply at a national level so that stocks remain available to meet regional and local demand. Information on stock levels within London is not held centrally.

There are over 70 hormone replacement therapy (HRT) products, and the vast majority are in good supply. Previously there has been issues with the supply of a limited number of these products, primarily driven by very sharp increases in demand. Following the Department's intensive engagement with industry, the supply position has improved considerably. As part of this we have met with suppliers on a very regular basis and have held seven HRT supply roundtables since April 2022, with the most recent in September 2024, with suppliers, wholesalers, and community pharmacists, to provide updates on the supply position and actions being taken to address them, to share data, and to discuss relevant policy developments and potential impacts.

We are aware of the supply issues affecting Estradot (estradiol) 50 microgram/24 hour, 75 microgram/24 hour, and 100 microgram/24 hour patches, for which we have issued comprehensive management guidance to the National Health Service, including Serious Shortage Protocols allowing community pharmacists to supply the equivalent strength patch of an alternative brand without the need for a new prescription. Alternative brands of estradiol patches remain available.

## ■ **Influenza: Health Services**

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[23901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of increases in cases of flu on NHS healthcare provision.

**Karin Smyth:**

During winter there is an increase in hospital admissions from seasonal respiratory conditions such as flu. This can impact hospital occupancy and the flow of patients through hospitals, which in turn impacts on accident and emergency, and ambulance services. Respiratory conditions can also impact the number of staff absences, which can further increase pressure on the provision of health care.

This year the number of beds occupied with flu has been higher than last year. The latest data shows there were, on average, 4,693 patients in hospital with flu in the week ending 12 January 2025, above the peak figure of 2,478 reported during winter 2023/24.

## ■ Influenza: Vaccination

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[22982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of NHS staff have been vaccinated for flu (a) this year and (b) at this stage in the flu cycle in each of the last four years.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Health Security Agency publishes monthly official statistics on flu vaccine coverage for frontline healthcare workers. The second monthly report of the 2024 to 2025 season was published on 19 December 2024, covering the period from 1 September to 30 November 2024, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-and-covid-19-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-monthly-data-2024-to-2025>

Data for the previous seasons is also available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-uptake#seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake:-figures>

The following table shows the percentage of seasonal flu vaccine uptake, the survey response rate, and the number of vaccinated people within those who answered the survey, rounded to the nearest hundred, from 2020/21 to 2024/25:

2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	
Percentage uptake	32.2%	38.5%	41.8%	52.5%	70.6%
Survey response rate	79%	79.8%	90.4%	82.3%	96.1%
Number of vaccinated survey responders	333,100	386,700	461,000	486,000	750,800

Notes:

1. the data on the number of vaccinated survey responders is not extrapolated to represent a 100% response rate, as the number of vaccinated people is based on only those who have responded to the survey.



2. the data for 2024/25 is not comparable to previous seasons due to this year's programme starting four weeks later than previous seasons.

the 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ■ Insomnia: Mental Health Services

**Pippa Heylings:**

[23193]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of NHS cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia; and whether he plans to increase the coverage of that therapy.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

It is for local integrated care boards to decide whether cognitive behavioural therapy should be offered to their local populations as a treatment for insomnia.

NHS Talking Therapies for anxiety and depression offers low-intensity therapy which may include interventions around sleep hygiene. Individuals who are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depression can self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies, with further information available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies/>

Individuals can also access helpful resources on sleep problems on the Every Mind Matters website, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/>

## ■ Integrated Care Boards: Cooperation

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [23623]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to promote cooperation between Integrated Care Boards on (a) data and (b) treatment options for patients.

**Karin Smyth:**

My rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has announced that there will be a single patient record that allow all providers access to a comprehensive record, to relevant depth and with appropriate safeguards. This would allow patient data to be shared, if necessary, between services in different integrated care boards (ICBs) and give professionals access to the information they need to make the best-informed decisions when delivering care and treatment.

In addition, the NHS Standing Rules set out specific obligations on ICBs to enable patients to choose aspects of their healthcare.

Commissioners need to ensure where a patient requires a physical health elective referral for a first outpatient appointment and any subsequent treatment that is required, to a consultant or a member of a consultant's team, the patient can choose any clinically appropriate provider that holds a qualifying NHS Standard Contract with

any ICB or NHS England, for the service which the patient needs because of the referral.

ICBs should be engaging with local primary and secondary care, and their peers, to build choice into commissioning plans and monitoring referral patterns for potential opportunities and issues related to choice.

## ■ Mental Health Services

**Adam Thompson:** [\[23011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) help prevent and (b) increase early intervention for mental ill health.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Shared Outcomes Fund Early Support Hubs project aims to increase the Government's understanding of the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention support for children and young people's mental health delivered in a community setting and strengthen the evidence base for early intervention. By evaluating the Early Support Hubs as a delivery model for early intervention, the project aims to build a strong evidence base, assess the impact of these services, and inform potential future expansion of the model. The evaluation of the project aims to report its findings by Summer 2025.

There are currently approximately 65 locally funded early support hubs in England offering early easy access mental health interventions to thousands of children and young people aged 11 to 25 years old, including those from low-income families.

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

Additionally, Every Mind Matters is a campaign run by NHS England, which features the mental health tool My Mind Plan at the heart of their resources and advice for those facing mental health problems.

## ■ Mental Health Services: Civil Society

**Adam Thompson:** [\[23012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking with the voluntary sector to introduce new ways of treating mental ill health.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Ministers and Departmental officials meet regularly with voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) stakeholders in the mental health sector to discuss a range of mental health issues and current challenges.

In October 2024 we launched the 10-Year Health Plan for the National Health Service to gather views from members of the public, NHS staff, VCSEs, and other organisations on their experiences and ideas to reform the NHS and make it fit for the

future. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed, to move healthcare from the hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. We are working closely with VCSEs and other mental health stakeholders to ensure the unique challenges for mental health services across England are reflected in 10-Year Health Plan.

## ■ **Mental Health Services: Romford**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[23280]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support his Department is providing to increase patient capacity on mental health wards in (a) Romford constituency and (b) the surrounding area.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

NHS England's 2024/25 priorities and operational planning guidance reinforces this focus on improving patient flow as a key priority, with local health systems directed to reduce the average length of stay in adult acute mental health wards to deliver more timely access to local beds. And in areas where there is a clear need for more beds, this has been addressed in part through investment in new units.

It is also important that when people are discharged, this happens in a way that considers their needs on discharge and any risks to their safety. To help support safe and timely discharge decisions, the Department published statutory guidance on discharge from mental health inpatient settings in January 2024. It sets out how health and care systems should work together to support safe discharge from all mental health and learning disability and autism inpatient settings for children, young people and adults. More information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/discharge-from-mental-health-inpatient-settings/discharge-from-mental-health-inpatient-settings>

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service fit for the future, we will make sure more mental health care is delivered in the community, close to people's homes, through new models of care and support, so that fewer people need to go into hospital.

## ■ **Mental Health Services: Standards**

**Joe Robertson:**

[22825]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure access to mental health services in (a) England, (b) areas with fewer mental health services and (c) rural areas.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Waiting lists for those referred for support are too high all across England, especially in areas with fewer mental health services, including for those in rural communities. People with mental health issues are not getting the support or care they deserve or need, which is why we will fix the broken system to ensure we give mental health the

same attention and focus as physical health, so that people can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it.

Nationally, we plan to recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment. We will also introduce access to a specialist mental health professional in every school and roll out Young Futures hubs in every community.

In addition, people of all ages who are in crisis or who are concerned about a family or loved one can now call 111, select the mental health option, and speak to a trained mental health professional. National Health Service staff can guide callers with next steps such as organising face-to-face community support or facilitating access to alternative services, like crisis cafés or safe havens, which provide a place for people to stay as an alternative to accident and emergency or a hospital admission. It is the responsibility of the integrated care boards to commission care to meet the needs of their local population.

## ■ **Mental Health Services: Young People**

**Adam Thompson:**

[\[23010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking with the (a) NHS and (b) voluntary sector to introduce (i) clinical and (ii) non-clinical responses for young people with mental health needs.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We are committed to delivering a range of support, both clinical and non-clinical, to improve children and young people's mental health. This includes recruiting an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult National Health Service mental health services, to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, helping to ease pressure on busy mental health services.

Nearly 500 NHS-funded mental health support teams were operational in approximately 8,500, or 34%, of schools and colleges across England as of the end of March 2024, covering 4.2 million, or 44%, of pupils or learners. These teams work with young people and parents to manage mild to moderate mental health conditions like anxiety and depression, while also assisting schools to develop a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing.

We will provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school in England and roll out Young Futures hubs in every community. The national network of Young Futures hubs is expected to bring local services together, and deliver support for teenagers at risk of being drawn into crime or facing mental health challenges. They will provide open access mental health support for children and young people in every community.

**■ Mental Health: Children and Young People**

**Munira Wilson:** [\[23435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will commission a survey of the mental health of children and young people in 2025.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Although there are no plans at present to commission further follow up waves to the 2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey, the Department recognises its importance. We will publish any such plans in due course.

**■ Nurses: Recruitment**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[23536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many nursing positions for the provision of care in corridors have been advertised in NHS hospitals since 4 July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department does not hold the information requested.

**■ Pharmacy: Rural Areas**

**Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[23900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure rural and semi-rural communities have access to pharmacies.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for understanding the health needs of their areas and for commissioning services to meet those needs. Local authorities are required to undertake a pharmaceutical needs assessment every three years to assess whether their population is adequately served and must keep these assessments under review. These assessments inform ICBs when reviewing applications for National Health Service pharmacies.

The Pharmacy Access Scheme provides additional funding to further support pharmacies in more remote areas. Additionally, in rural areas where there is no pharmacy, general practitioners are permitted to dispense medicines. Patients can also choose to access medicines and pharmacy services through any of the nearly 400 NHS online pharmacies that are contractually required to deliver prescription medicines free of charge to patients.

**■ Postnatal Care: Mental Health Services**

**Dr Allison Gardner:** [\[22849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve provision of post-natal mental health care in Stoke-on-Trent.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Stoke-on-Trent is one of 75 local authorities that is receiving funding to provide bespoke perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship support through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme.

However, more is needed. Access to these services varies across the country and too many people with mental health issues, including mothers in the 24 months postpartum, are not getting the support or care they need. NHS England is working to ensure that services are accessible to all women who need them.

**Primary Health Care: Standards****Samantha Niblett:**[\[23992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to support primary care to reduce the time it takes to receive (a) results and (b) appointments from secondary care services.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Elective Reform Plan, launched as part of the Government's Plan for Change, sets out plans to improve patients' experience, so that it is as smooth, supportive, and convenient as possible. This includes giving them more control and flexibility, and designing care around their needs.

Effective integration of primary and secondary care will be essential to helping ensure results and appointments are communicated quickly to both general practitioners and patients. We have set out improvements to digital tools, including a revolutionised NHS App, to help patients to contact their treatment provider more easily and conveniently, to receive clear information, regular updates, and test results.

By March 2025, patients at over 85% of acute trusts will be able to view appointment information via the NHS App. By December 2025, we will build on the success of digitising appointment letters by making more types of content about patients' treatment available on the NHS App, such as discharge letters and results.

**Prostate Cancer: Ethnic Groups****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[23841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the National Prostate Cancer Audit's report entitled NPCA State of the Nation Report 2024, published January 2025, what steps he is taking to tackle inequalities preventing Black men from (a) receiving early diagnosis and (b) accessing NICE recommended treatments following advanced prostate cancer diagnosis.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

To address disparities and find ways to better detect prostate cancer earlier, we have invested £16 million in the United Kingdom-wide TRANSFORM trial, aimed at helping find the best ways of detecting prostate cancer in men, even if they are not displaying any symptoms. This research will aim to address some of the inequalities that exist in

prostate cancer diagnosis by targeting black men in trial recruitment, ensuring that one in ten participants are black men.

Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish a new National Cancer Plan, which will include further details on how we will improve access to treatments and outcomes for all tumour types, including prostate cancer. 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. We will provide updates on this in due course.

## ■ **Queen's Hospital Romford: Accident and Emergency Departments**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[23279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support his Department is providing to increase patient capacity in the Queen's Hospital, Romford Accident and Emergency Department.

**Karin Smyth:**

Operational matters, including decisions on local hospital capacity, are primarily matters for local National Health Service trusts working with NHS commissioners.

The NHS has supported increased patient demand for accident and emergency services by strengthening same day emergency care, supporting vaccination efforts for COVID-19, flu, and the respiratory syncytial virus, and increasing the provision of community services.

In addition, due to the action taken by the Government, this winter NHS hospitals are free of strikes and focused on caring for patients.

## ■ **Social Services: Standards**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[23322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle delays to care packages.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Local authorities are best placed to understand and plan for the needs of their population, which is why, under the Care Act 2014, local authorities are tasked with the duty to shape their care market and to commission services to meet the diverse needs of all local people. In performing that duty, a local authority must have regard to current and likely future demand for such services, and consider how providers might meet that demand.

The Government has announced that a revised policy framework for the Better Care Fund in 2025/26 will shortly be published. This will outline redefined goals that emphasise its commitment to shifting care from hospital to home, and from sickness to prevention.

The Government is supporting local authorities by making up to £3.7 billion of additional funding available for social care authorities in 2025/26, which includes an £880 million increase in the Social Care Grant.

### ■ Streptococcus: Clinical Trials

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [23720]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he expects to receive the outcome of the Group B Streptococcus trial from the UK National Screening Committee.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Recruitment to the Group B Streptococcus trial undertaken by the University of Nottingham has ended. The researchers are analysing the data and will draft a report in due course.

The UK National Screening Committee's Secretariat is in close and regular contact with the researchers. The committee will review the evidence from the trial, once the report is available.

### ■ Surgery: Reform

**Dr Simon Opher:** [22730]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential (a) barriers and (b) costs for NHS trusts in implementing the perioperative care measures outlined in the document entitled Reforming elective care for patients, published on 6 January 2025.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 13 January 2025]:* The perioperative care measures outlined in the Elective Care Reform plan build on existing NHS England led work to improve perioperative care including guidance on Earlier screening, risk assessment and health optimisation for adult patients due to have inpatient care. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/earlier-screening-risk-assessment-and-health-optimisation-in-perioperative-pathways-guide-for-providers-and-integrated-care-boards>

NHS England has worked closely with systems and providers including through onsite visits and system level engagement to understand the key barriers to implementing the perioperative care measures outlined in the Elective Reform Plan.

Whilst costings will vary between organisations, measures from this work alongside supporting improved patient experience and outcomes, will support the delivery of sustainable clinical pathways. This will lead to reduced waste in the National Health Service, for example by ensuring productivity in theatres is maximised.



**Dr Simon Opher:**

[\[22731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the document entitled Reforming elective care for patients, published on 6 January 2025, which groups of patients will be offered the prehabilitation services outlined in that plan; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending those services to all patients referred for surgery.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 13 January 2025]:* The Elective Care Reform Plan identifies the importance of supporting all patients to take control of their health, for example through smoking cessation and weight loss programmes, as they prepare for their surgery. As well as improving patient outcomes, this can also enable patients to be treated in lower acuity settings, for example in day case settings enabling patients to go home the same day.

The plan states that NHS England will work through Cancer Alliances to support improvements in prehabilitation for people about to undergo cancer treatment. The approach to this will be informed by the Macmillan Cancer Support/National Institute of Health and Care Research guidance for healthcare professionals, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/news-and-resources/guides/principles-and-guidance-for-prehabilitation>

An update on this guidance is expected in spring 2025, alongside existing good practice examples.

Current NHS England guidance requires acute trusts in England to adopt earlier screening, risk assessment and health optimisation for adult patients waiting for inpatient surgery, with more information available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/earlier-screening-risk-assessment-and-health-optimisation-in-perioperative-pathways-guide-for-providers-and-integrated-care-boards>

NHS England will continue to identify and work with areas of England that have programmes in place for different groups of patients waiting for surgery, including prehabilitation programmes to support patients having major surgery and waiting well programmes to support patients having all types of surgery, to learn from and share best practice.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Action Fraud

**James McMurdock:**

[\[22865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the Action Fraud reporting system.

**Dan Jarvis:**

This Government is committed to working with law enforcement, civil society and industry to better protect the public and businesses from fraud.

The current technology used by the Action Fraud service is outdated and cannot cope with demand, with fraud and cyber crime now accounting for an estimated 49% of all crime recorded in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

We are replacing the current Action Fraud service with a new, improved service. The to provide better support services and reporting tools for victims, provide greater intelligence to law enforcement, and allow for greater prevention and disruption at scale.

**Asylum****Neil O'Brien:****[23837]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of asylum claims in each local authority were (a) successful, (b) ongoing and (c) rejected since 2018.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on the initial decision of asylum claims (including grants and refusals), and data on asylum claims awaiting initial decision, is published in tables Asy\_D02 and Asy\_D03 of the '[Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets](#)' respectively. This data is not broken down by local authority.

Local authority level data on people in the asylum system who are in receipt of support is published in table Asy\_D11 of the '[Asylum seekers in receipt of support by local authority detailed datasets](#)'.

The latest data relates to the year ending September 2024.

**Cannabis: Medical Treatments****Jim Shannon:****[22613]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of awareness amongst police constabularies of the legislation around the use of prescribed medical cannabis.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

CBPMs were placed in Schedule 2 to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 ("the 2001 Regulations") in 2018. This means that specialist clinicians can prescribe CBPMs where they deem it clinically appropriate and in the best interests of their patients, and patients may legally possess CBPMs when in possession of a valid UK prescription or if they are a participant in a clinical trial. Home Office Circular 018/2018, summarising the introduction of CBPMs, was published when the measures came into force.

Home Office circulars are aimed primarily at law enforcement, including the police, and are published on gov.uk. Circular 018/2018 is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/circular-0182018-rescheduling-of-cannabis-based-products-for-medicinal-use-in-humans>.

The Home Office liaises with the police to support awareness and understanding of drug legislation across police forces. This includes liaison through the National Police Chief's Council

Additionally, the Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care contributed to the guidance document "Medical cannabis (and cannabis oils)", which is available on the NHS' page on at the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/medical-cannabis/>.

### ■ **Electronic Cigarettes: Smuggling**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[23422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the number of illegal vapes seized at the border in (a) 2024 and (b) 2023.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

Border Force have a strong track record in targeting illegal commodities, and continue to ensure that all goods brought into the UK by passengers are appropriately declared and abide by customs and excise rules.

For information the latest transparency returns can be found at the link here: [Border Force transparency data: Q3 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

### ■ **Electronic Travel Authorisations: Northern Ireland**

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[23718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will have discussions with representatives of the travel industry on the potential impact of electronic travel authorisations on international visitors to Northern Ireland.

**Seema Malhotra:**

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer provided on 14 January to Question UIN 23002.

### ■ **Fire and Rescue Services: Surrey**

**Dr Al Pinkerton:** [\[22838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that fire services in Surrey can guarantee public safety during periods of insufficient staffing.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Firefighters play a vital role in keeping the public safe and we are grateful for the work undertaken by fire and rescue services across the country in support of their local communities.

The Government is committed to ensuring fire and rescue services have the resources they need to do their important work. Overall, fire and rescue authorities will receive around £2.87 billion during 2024/25. Standalone FRAs will see an increase in core spending power of £95.4m during 2024/25. This is an increase of 5.6 per cent in cash terms compared to 2023/24.

It is for the Fire Authority to guarantee that their Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) can secure sufficient resources to meet public safety during periods of insufficient staffing. This includes ensuring that their FRS has sufficiently trained, qualified and competent persons to meet their legislated functional requirements.

### ■ Home Office: Flags

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[23032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what flags she plans to fly outside her Department other than the Union flag in the next 12 months; and on which days each flag will be flown.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Current Home Office ministers have not been consulted on this issue since coming to office, but prompted by the Hon Member's question, we have advised that there should be no change from the arrangements in place under the previous government, whatever they may have been.

### ■ Knives: Crime

**Anneliese Midgley:**

[\[22741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the level of knife crime in Knowsley constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Halving national levels of knife crime over the next decade is a key part of the Government's mission to ensure the safety of our streets.

We will continue to support police forces, agencies and those who share our ambition to halve knife crime, to take actions that work most effectively in their local communities. As we do so, the Government will continue to draw on the best available evidence on both prevention and enforcement and will closely monitor trends in national and local levels of knife crime.

We have also created a new Young Futures programme which will include the setting up of Prevention Partnerships across England and Wales – to help areas intervene 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.

Under the previous Government, Merseyside has received over £20m to develop its Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) since 2019, with an additional £4.34m available this financial year. The Merseyside VRP works closely with a range of

partners to deliver targeted preventative interventions. These include Hospital Navigators (youth workers based in A&E settings who engage young people at critical 'teachable moments' to steer them away from violence), whole family cognitive behavioural therapy programmes, social skills training, broader mentoring initiatives, and sports-based diversionary activities. This work includes targeted delivery in areas within Knowsley.

We recognise the valuable work and significant progress VRUs have made in understanding and preventing serious violence. The proposed Police Funding Settlement for 2025-26 includes £49.7m to ensure continuation of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) programme.

### ■ Neighbourhood Policing: Knowsley

**Anneliese Midgley:**

[\[22740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps her Department has taken to improve neighbourhood policing in Knowsley constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

As part of our Safer Streets Mission we will restore neighbourhood policing, with 13,000 additional police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles across England and Wales. Every part of the country needs to benefit from this pledge, and of course that includes Knowsley.

The Home Office is working closely with policing to implement this Commitment and will announce its plans for the delivery of neighbourhood officers shortly.

### ■ Offences against Children

**James McMurdock:**

[\[22871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many cases of child sex trafficking have been identified in the UK in each of the last five years; and what steps she is taking to ensure (a) accurate and (b) transparent data collection for those crimes.

**Jess Phillips:**

The trafficking of children for sexual exploitation is a truly horrific crime. This Government has set out an unprecedented mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, and we will use all the levers available to us to deliver this. This will include working closely with law enforcement partners, such as the Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme (TOEX), which continues work to develop a whole system approach to improving intelligence, analysis, and tasking to enhance law enforcement response to the exploitation of vulnerable people, including victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse.

The following table shows the number of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM, the framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery to appropriate support) for (partial or whole) sexual exploitation for children, at age of exploitation.

YEAR	NRM REFERRALS FOR (EITHER PARTIAL OR WHOLE) SEXUAL EXPLOITATION FOR CHILDREN AT AGE OF EXPLOITATION
2020	824
2021	943
2022	1115
2023	1118
2024 (up to Q3)	1036

In addition to the statutory support local authorities provide to victims of modern slavery, for potential child victims, the Government has rolled out the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service to two thirds of local authorities in England and Wales. The ICTG service is currently delivered by Barnardo's.

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[22978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking to support (a) victims and (b) victims families impacted by grooming gangs; and what steps she is taking to ensure these incidents don't occur in the future.

**Jess Phillips:**

We have been clear that this Government is prioritising work to safeguard children, ensure victims and survivors are protected and supported, while pursuing offenders and bringing them to justice.

I have supported, and continue to support, many victims and survivors of grooming gangs and other forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse, both in my capacity as Minister, Member of Parliament and continuing support for those I worked with before becoming an MP.

And we are continuing to work across Government and with policing and law enforcement partners at pace to further strengthen our prevention of and response to all forms of child sexual abuse. This includes the commitments the Home Secretary has outlined in Parliament to introduce a mandatory duty for those working with children to report sexual abuse and exploitation, to make grooming an aggravating factor to toughen up sentencing, and to improve data collection across forces.

In her statement on 16 January 2025, the Home Secretary announced that the Government will be working to develop a new framework for victim-centred, locally-led inquiries, where they are needed, and as a first step to work with Oldham Council and up to four other pilot areas. This will also include support for local authorities who want to explore other ways of supporting victims, including setting up local panels or drawing on the experience of the IICSA Truth Project.

The Home Secretary will also ask all chief constables to look again at historic gang exploitation cases where 'No Further Action' was taken, and work with the police Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce to pursue new lines of inquiry and re-open investigations where appropriate and these new measures will be backed by £2 million of additional funding for the taskforce and the panel.

In addition to the statutory support local authorities provide to victims of modern slavery, for potential child victims, the Government has rolled out the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service to two thirds of local authorities in England and Wales. The ICTG service is currently delivered by Barnardo's.

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[23051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on how many (a) police officers, (b) officials of local authorities and (c) social workers who were found to have had knowledge at the time of grooming by Pakistani heritage grooming gangs are in positions with a duty of care towards girls.

**Jess Phillips:**

The Government is actively working to ensure that all institutions and individuals remain responsible and accountable in protecting children from all forms of child sexual abuse. This includes compliance with existing statutory safeguarding duties, and the introduction of a new mandatory reporting duty, which will introduce criminal sanctions to drive greater accountability.

In addition, the Home Secretary announced to Parliament on 16 January 2025 the further steps that the Government is taking to ensure proper accountability for those institutions and individuals who failed to take the necessary action to prevent group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation in the past, including through additional nationally supported local inquiries.

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[23881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when her Department will publish the ethnicity data on grooming gangs collected by the police.

**Jess Phillips:**

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the Home Secretary's statement made on 16 January 2025, in which she announced the appointment of Baroness Louise Casey to lead a rapid three-month audit into these issues. The audit will examine all the currently available data and evidence to help us to better understand the nature, scale and profile of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation being dealt with by police forces in the UK today, including ethnicity; to identify gaps in existing knowledge; and to make recommendations that can then be applied at local level.

## ■ **Police Custody: Databases**

**Chris Philp:**

[\[22938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average number of open custody records was in (a) 2019, (b) 2022, (c) 2023 and (d) 2024.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The information requested is not currently held centrally.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on detentions in police custody in England and Wales, available here: [Police powers and procedures England and Wales statistics - GOV.UK](#).

This data includes the number of detentions by financial year, with the most recently available data up to March 2023. Data for the year ending March 2024 will be available in February 2025.

**Police: Boston and Skegness****Richard Tice:****[23053]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will increase police funding in Boston and Skegness constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

In December 2024 the Government published the 2025-26 provisional police funding settlement, which proposed funding of up to £19.5 billion for the policing system in England and Wales. This is an overall increase of up to £1 billion when compared to 2024-25 and equates to a 3% real terms increase in funding.

In 2025-26, Lincolnshire Police will receive up to £173.2 million, an increase of up to £9.0 million compared to 2024-25.

**Police: Civilians****Dave Robertson:****[23045]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of police-support staffing levels in England and Wales; and whether her Department has been made aware of instances where police officers have been required to carry out the duties of support staff.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The government expects that police officers will be used in tackling crime and protecting the public.

It is for Chief Constables and directly elected PCCs, and Mayors with PCC functions to make operational decisions based on their local knowledge and experience, including how best to allocate resources.

**Police: Software****Chris Philp:****[22933]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time spent by people in custody in police holding cells was in the two years (a) before and (b) after the introduction of the CONNECT software; and how many people have been detained in police holding cells by each police force for (i) 0 to 12 hours, (ii) 13 to 24 hours, (iii) 25 to 36 hours, (iv) 37 to 48 hours and (v) 49 hours or more since January 2019.



**Chris Philp:** [\[22934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much has been spent on the CONNECT computer software since its introduction by the Metropolitan Police on (a) further development of the software, (b) training including (i) accommodation, (ii) travel, (iii) classrooms, (iv) trainers and (v) overtime incurred by officers), (c) internal IT services to resolve CONNECT issues including ConnectHub, (d) shifts covered by officers to support staff with CONNECT, (e) initial purchase fees and installation, (f) other costs and (g) in total.

**Chris Philp:** [\[22935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time it takes an officer to complete a case file is on (a) CONNECT and (b) Case Overview and Prosecutions Application (COPA).

**Chris Philp:** [\[22936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police forces purchased CONNECT computer software; and how many such forces (a) no longer and (b) continue to use the software.

**Chris Philp:** [\[22937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average number of case file (a) rejections and (b) discontinuations by the Crown Prosecution Service was (i) before and (ii) after the introduction of the CONNECT computer software.

**Chris Philp:** [\[22939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average annual number is of case files rejected due to incorrectly submitted documents using (a) Case Overview and Prosecutions Application (COPA) and (b) CONNECT computer software.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Police forces and Policing and Crime Commissioners are responsible for their procurement and commercial strategies for Records Management Systems.

Each force is responsible for evaluating the performance of their Record Management System in line with those strategies and their local requirements.

It would not be appropriate for the Home Office to comment on the individual performance of one supplier in relation to the factors mentioned.

## ■ Pornography Review

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[23818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Science and Technology on publication of the independent Pornography Review.

**Jess Phillips:**

I met with Baroness Bertin, Chair of the Independent Pornography Review, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Minister Davies-Jones, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice to discuss the Pornography Review on 8 October 2024.

In the meeting, Baroness Bertin, shared her initial findings and direction of travel for the Review's recommendations. The Review's final report will be published in due course.

■ **Vetting: Sussex****James MacCleary:**[\[23080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the average processing time for Disclosure and Barring Service checks conducted through Sussex Police.

**Jess Phillips:**

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is operationally independent from the Home Office. Accordingly, the Home Office does not hold the information requested on the average processing time for DBS checks conducted through Sussex Police.

My officials have asked the DBS to write to you to provide you with the information you have requested.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ **Affordable Housing: Construction****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[22327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 16498 on Affordable Housing: Construction, if she will publish the grant given to each (a) developer and (b) consortium under the last Affordable Housing Programme with the number of affordable homes due to be delivered broken down by type of affordable tenure.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Greater London Authority (GLA) publish a quarterly update of all approvals for grant in their delegated approvals log which can be found on the GLA website [here](#). Due to the nature of negotiations with partners on individual site delivery, the GLA does not publish grant levels for specific projects or tenures. Under the Affordable Homes Programme 2016-23, programme-level grants per unit levels were applied.

Homes England has published data on the 2016-23 Affordable Homes Programme, with data reflecting grant allocations to the end of March 2021. It can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

## ■ Affordable Housing: Green Belt

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether site specific viability assessments should be undertaken to assess whether the affordable housing requirement on development in the Green Belt is viable and developer contributions should be adjusted as a result.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

As set out in the Planning Practice Guidance on viability, where development takes place on land situated in, or released from, the Green Belt and is subject to the 'Golden Rules' set out in [paragraph 156](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework, site specific viability assessment should not be undertaken or taken into account for the purpose of reducing developer contributions, including affordable housing.

The government intends to review the guidance on viability and will be considering whether there are circumstances in which site-specific viability assessment may be taken into account, for example, on large sites and Previously Developed Land.

## ■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission

**David Simmonds:** [\[22382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 20283 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission, if the (a) Chinese Embassy (b) the Chinese Government and (c) its representatives discussed the Chinese Embassy planning application via correspondence.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Prior to the application being called in, there was no such correspondence. Following call in, there has been correspondence between the Planning Inspectorate and interested parties ahead of the forthcoming public inquiry.

## ■ Community Assets

**Stuart Anderson:** [\[22675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to encourage community ownership of locally valued assets at risk.

**Alex Norris:**

On 23 December 2024, this government announced the outcome of the Community Ownership Fund Round 4, and awarded £36.2 million to 85 projects across the UK. This represents the largest ever window of the Fund to date, both in terms of funding awarded and number of projects.

The Devolution White Paper, which was published on 16 December, set out plans which demonstrate our commitment to communities and there will be further announcements relating to communities this year, including on the community ownership of assets.

## ■ Construction: Employers' Contributions

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[21627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions on (a) construction and (b) housebuilding.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government considered the cost pressures facing all employers as part of the Spending Review process.

## ■ Council Housing: Anti-social Behaviour

**Dr Allison Gardner:** [\[22531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support local councils to tackle antisocial behaviour within council homes.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Social landlords, including local councils, already have a range of powers and enforcement tools to tackle anti-social behaviour including powers to evict perpetrators. We expect landlords to use those powers promptly and proportionately, putting the needs of victims at the heart of their response. The government is strengthening these powers through the Renters' Rights Bill for private registered providers.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission. We will crack down on those making neighbourhoods feel unsafe and unwelcoming by introducing the new Respect Order, which local authorities will be able to apply for and which will carry tough sanctions and penalties for persistent adult offenders. The police, local authorities and social landlords may already apply for a Civil Injunction under Section 1 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to prevent behaviour that is causing housing-related nuisance and annoyance.

## ■ Council Tax

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to publicly advertise her Department's guidance entitled Paying the right level of Council Tax: a plain English guide to Council Tax, updated 26 April 2024.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government does not have any plans to launch a publicity campaign for this guide. The government's plain English guide to council tax sets out how the council tax system operates and the support available in the system. This guide is freely available on gov.uk.

**David Simmonds:**

[\[22718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 4.1.6 of the consultation entitled Local authority funding reform: objectives and principles, published on 18 December 2024, whether councils which have set council tax levels above the assumed level of council tax will, all other factors being equal, receive a higher grant.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government is inviting views on the objectives and principles of local authority funding reform, including on measuring differences in locally available resources such as council tax. Following this consultation, we will develop, publish and consult on a detailed plan for local authority funding reform ahead of the provisional Settlement for 2026-27.

With reference to proposals set out in paragraph 4.1.6 of the consultation, councils which have set council tax levels above the assumed level of council tax, will not, all else equal, receive higher grant allocations.

This is because by making a uniform assumption of the council tax level in our measure of locally available resources, any individual council's council tax level is not directly associated with their grant allocation. A council's grant allocation will instead be impacted by the number and banding of liable dwellings in the local authority (i.e. their 'Tax Base').

Any council that sets council tax levels above the assumed level of council tax will receive more income in total than if it had not done so.

As set out in the consultation on local authority funding reform, the government believes that making uniform assumptions on the council tax level charged by all authorities, and on factors which determine their ability to raise council tax, promotes simplicity, fairness, and accountability.

#### ■ **Council Tax: Greater London**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Mayor of London has requested a higher council tax referendum for 2025-26.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government is currently consulting on the provisional local government finance settlement including the proposed council tax referendum principles for 2025-26. It has not received a request from the Mayor of London for additional flexibilities in the referendum principles.

#### ■ **Council Tax: Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, published on 18

December 2024, if she will make it her policy to ensure that the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead cannot increase council tax by 25% in 2025-26 without a council tax referendum of local residents.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government is currently consulting on the provisional local government finance settlement for 2025-26 including the referendum principles that will be set. The ability for councils in exceptional financial circumstances to request council tax increases is not new. As with previous years the government will consider requests for bespoke referendum principles from councils seeking exceptional financial support, but this government will put taxpayers at the forefront of their consideration.

The government will consider requests on a case-by-case basis and expects that any additional increases would only be agreed in exceptional circumstances. The government has been clear it will look carefully at councils' specific circumstances, for example their existing levels of council tax relative to the average and the strength of plans to protect vulnerable people.

■ **Counter-terrorism**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 24 November 2024 to Question 20295 on Counter-terrorism, whether the principles of the written ministerial statement of 14 March 2024 on New Extremism Definition and Community Engagement Principles, HCWS342, remain her policy.

**Alex Norris:**

The Written Ministerial Statement of 14 March 2024 made by the previous Secretary of State reflects the position of the previous government at that time.

■ **Elections: Norfolk County Council**

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[23049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what impact the Devolution Priority Programme will have on elections to Norfolk County Council.

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[23050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when a final decision on elections to Norfolk County Council will be made.

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[23206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that the Norfolk County Council elections take place on 1 May 2025.

**Jim McMahon:**

As set out in my letter of 16 December to all councils in two-tier areas and neighbouring small unitaries, I will consider requests to postpone local elections where it is clear that postponement will help the area to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe. I am currently considering such a request from Norfolk County Council for their election scheduled in May 2025 to be postponed for one year. I will announce my decision on this request in due course, recognising the need to give confirmation as soon as practically possible.

My letter and a list of local authorities who have made requests that involve postponing their election from 2025 to 2026 can be found [here](#).

**Flood Control****Gareth Davies:**[\[23494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to activate the Flood Recovery Framework in response to flooding (a) in Lincolnshire and (b) elsewhere in January 2025.

**Alex Norris:**

My thoughts remain with householders and business owners impacted by flooding after the recent heavy rainfall, flooding is a devastating experience for all those affected.

Government support in the aftermath of flooding is only provided in exceptional circumstances and at present, overall, the scale of impacts is not sufficiently significant for the Flood Recovery Framework to be activated in any area. However, my officials continue to review impacts data and stand ready to support as appropriate.

**Flood Control: Leicestershire****Dr Jeevun Sandher:**[\[23076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Flood Recovery Framework will be activated for the flooding in Leicestershire.

**Alex Norris:**

My thoughts remain with householders and business owners impacted by flooding after the recent heavy rainfall, flooding is a devastating experience for all those affected.

Government support in the aftermath of flooding is only provided in exceptional circumstances and at present, overall, the scale of impacts is not sufficiently significant for the Flood Recovery Framework to be activated. However, my officials continue to review impacts data and stand ready to support as appropriate.

Activation of the Framework is not limited to flooding following named storms and, when activated, provides a range of support to business and households in eligible areas.

**■ Houseboats: Security of Tenure****Apsana Begum:** [\[22356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to increase the security of tenure of houseboat dwellers.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government recognises that while the occupants of residential boats have the benefit of protection under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and wider consumer protection legislation, they do not enjoy the same level of tenure security as those in the private rented sector.

We will consider what action might be necessary to provide houseboat residents across with greater security in their homes.

**■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Cultural Heritage****Nick Timothy:** [\[22742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies.

**Alex Norris:**

The Art displayed within MHCLG is part of the Government Property Art Collection. Our only heritage asset is New Burlington House, and the day to day management including decisions on cultural issues falls to the tenants who occupy the building.

As separate entities, the responsibility for creating policy and guidance for artwork sits with each individual Arm's Length Body, rather than with the Department.

**■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 18378 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments, what assessment she made of the potential impact of changing the non-executive board members on the effectiveness of that board.

**Alex Norris:**

It is standard practice across government for non-executive board membership to be periodically reviewed, to ensure that the expertise and advice provided is a suitable fit for performance and delivery priorities. We have full confidence in our ongoing governance arrangements and will be announcing the remaining appointments to the Board in due course.



## ■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Religion

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which religions and faiths her Department formally recognises; and which faith days for those religions or faiths her Department formally marks.

**Alex Norris:**

The United Kingdom is strengthened by individuals of different faiths and of no faith, and the valuable contribution they make to our communities. The Faith Minister meets regularly with leaders and representatives of major faiths and beliefs.

A large number of religious festivals take place each year and we understand the importance of these festivals to our communities. Many of the major religious festivals are marked through receptions, ministerial attendance at events or through social media channels.

## ■ Multiple Occupation: Planning Permission

**Phil Brickell:** [\[22786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of planning permission requirements for Houses in Multiple Occupation.

**Phil Brickell:** [\[22787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many Houses in Multiple Occupation have been developed without requiring planning permission in Bolton West constituency in the last 12 months.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

National permitted development rights allow a C3 dwellinghouse to change use to a C4 House in Multiple Occupation for up to six people sharing facilities without the need for a planning application. Larger Houses in Multiple Occupation require a planning application which the local authority will determine in accordance with the local development plan and following public consultation.

Local authorities can remove the permitted development right to protect local amenity or wellbeing of the area by introducing an 'Article 4' direction.

The Department do not hold data on how many Houses in Multiple Occupation have been created through permitted development rights.

## ■ Noise: Pollution Control

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues to local authorities about (a) planning, (b) licensing and (c) statutory nuisance aspects of noise complaints about (i) long-standing clocks and bells and (ii) other established uses.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development is appropriate for its location including the likely effects of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site to the wider area.

Where the operation of an existing business or community facility could have a significant adverse effect on new development in its vicinity, the Framework expects the applicant to provide suitable mitigation before the development has been completed.

Planning Policy Guidance on noise advises how planning can manage potential noise impacts in new developments.

Further guidance on noise and statutory nuisance is published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Home Office.

**■ Private Rented Housing: Fees and Charges****Kevin Hollinrake:****[R] [22330]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether private landlords will be required to pay an ongoing fee to register with the (a) Private Rented Sector database and (b) private rented sector landlord ombudsman in addition to licensing fees payable to local authorities with selective licensing requirements.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Renters' Rights Bill includes provisions for the Private Rented Sector Database to be funded through fees charged to private landlords when they register. The new service will bring substantial benefits to landlords – providing a single source of information about their legal responsibilities and helping them showcase their compliance. The fees charged will also support local councils to enforce against unscrupulous landlords who undercut the responsible majority. Further details on fees will be set out in secondary legislation. We will take steps to make sure costs remain reasonable, proportionate, and sustainable.

Landlords will be required to pay for membership of the PRS Landlord Ombudsman. This is in line with practice across other sectors where there are ombudsmen already established, including for social landlords who currently pay £8.03 per unit annually. The Ombudsman will set the fee on the basis of their running costs and service provision and the government will ensure that the fee is proportionate and good value. We will seek to maximise operational efficiency of the database service and ombudsman, including through sharing of data.

The Private Rented Sector Database will operate alongside selective licensing to drive improvement in standards in the private rented sector, not as a replacement for these schemes. We will continue to review the use of selective licensing as we implement the Private Rented Sector Database. We are clear in guidance that local authorities should be mindful of any cost impacts to landlords, particularly those who are already fully compliant with their obligations.

## ■ Private Rented Housing: Standards

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[R] [\[22032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to integrate the regulatory requirements for private landlords of (a) the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, (b) the Decent Homes Standard, (c) the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, (d) selective licensing and (e) landlord registration.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government recognises the importance of safe, warm homes for the millions of tenants living in the private rented sector (PRS). Through the Renters' Rights Bill we will apply a Decent Homes Standard to the PRS to give renters safer, better value homes and remove the blight of poor-quality homes in local communities. The Bill will also apply 'Awaab's Law' to the sector, which will set clear legal expectations about the timeframes within which PRS landlords must make homes safe where they contain serious hazards. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will consult shortly on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector. The government will consider opportunities for alignment and simplification as we implement these regulations and will support landlords with comprehensive guidance.

The Renters' Rights Bill also includes provides to introduce a PRS Database. The new database service will bring substantial benefits to landlords – providing a single source of information about their legal responsibilities and helping them showcase their compliance. It will operate alongside selective licensing to drive improvement in standards in the private rented sector. We will seek to maximise operational efficiency of the database service and Local Authority Selective Licensing schemes, including through sharing data.

## ■ Retail Trade: Empty Property

**Luke Akehurst:**

[\[23043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of trends in levels of retail and commercial units that are vacant in (a) Chester-le-Street, (b) Stanley and (c) England.

**Alex Norris:**

This government is committed to revitalise town centres and stimulate economic growth by addressing persistent vacancy rates in town centres like Chester-le-Street and Stanley. High Street Rental Auctions, which came into effect in December 2024, give local authorities in England the power to auction the lease of commercial high street property that has been vacant for longer than 12 months in a 24-month period.

The government also plans to introduce a new 'right to buy' for valued community assets through the English Devolution Bill. This will allow local communities to revitalise important assets, such as empty shops, pubs and community spaces, which can help to eliminate the impact of vacant premises.

Using these powers, and working in partnership with the North East Combined Authority and Durham County Council, will help to deliver a Local Growth Plan, supporting town centres in the North East by driving inclusive economic growth.

### ■ **Smoking: Public Places**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to page 99 of the English Devolution White Paper, CP 1218, whether councils will be able to ban smoking in public places under the new byelaw powers.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government will work with councils to determine how byelaws should be made and whether byelaw making powers should be extended to Strategic Authorities, as set out in the English Devolution White Paper.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will extend smoke-free designation to outdoor places including outside schools, children's playgrounds and hospitals but not to outdoor hospitality settings or wider open spaces like beaches. The proposed reforms under the Bill will be subject to a full consultation, and we want to hear the views of people from across the country on this to ensure we get it right. As drafted, the Bill does not give any additional powers to local authorities.

### ■ **Urban Areas: Recreation Spaces**

**Satvir Kaur:** [\[23081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to increase green spaces in urban communities.

**Satvir Kaur:** [\[23082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to empower (a) individuals, (b) grassroots organisations and (c) local authorities to increase (i) green spaces and (ii) biodiversity in their communities.

**Alex Norris:**

The Government is committed to creating better access to parks and green spaces for everyone.

The MHCLG-owned Green Flag Award scheme sets the national standard for parks and green spaces that are welcoming, safe, well-maintained and promote biodiversity and community participation, promoting best practice across the sector.

Planning regulations including Local Green Space Designation and Biodiversity Net Gain bolster the creation and protection of green spaces.

Cross government initiatives to increase available natural space and make it more accessible includes Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework and Defra's Access for All and Farming in Protected Landscapes programmes.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies, 48 locally led strategies covering all England, set priorities and map proposals for key actions to drive nature recovery and environmental improvement.

### ■ **Workplace Pensions: Councillors and Mayors**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her policy is on the provision of pensions funded from the public purse for (a) councillors, (b) council mayors and (c) combined authority mayors.

**Jim McMahon:**

Currently, mayors and councillors in England are not eligible for membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), after access was removed in 2014. As the Responsible Authority for the LGPS, MHCLG keeps access to the scheme under regular review.

## JUSTICE

### ■ **Juries: Allowances**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[23824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the allowances permitted for those undertaking jury duty for (a) loss of earnings, (b) cost of any care or childcare, (c) food and drink and (d) travel and parking costs.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Jury service is an important civic duty, and we want to help jurors feel supported as they undertake this important job. The support provided to jurors includes measures to assist those who may suffer financial hardship. People who are not paid by their employer whilst they are on jury service can claim a loss of earnings allowance from the court, and jurors can apply for a deferral or excusal based upon financial hardship. The Government will keep under review all support provided to jurors throughout their service.

### ■ **Legal Aid Scheme: Travellers**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the policy is of (a) her Department and (b) HM Courts and Tribunal Service on granting legal aid to travellers for enforcement cases against unauthorised (i) development and (ii) encampments.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Determinations about whether an individual qualifies for legal aid are made by the Director of Legal Aid Casework or Legal Aid Agency staff authorised by the Director to make determinations. The statutory role of Director of Legal Aid Casework was

created under section 4 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). In making individual determinations, the Director must act independently of Ministers, applying the relevant statutory framework. The Lord Chancellor may not issue directions or guidance in relation to an individual case.

There is no specific policy relating to granting legal aid to travellers regarding any form of enforcement activity. All applications for legal aid are considered on a case-by-case basis against the statutory framework and any applicable general guidance issued by the Lord Chancellor. Legal aid will be granted in all cases where the appropriate eligibility criteria are met.

The relevant eligibility criteria will depend on the nature of the case and in particular if it is a civil or criminal case and whether it is in scope of civil services as described under Schedule 1, Part 1 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 or outside of scope in which case it would be considered against the criteria for exceptional case funding (ECF). Although the specific criteria will differ depending on the type of applications, the individual will need to demonstrate that they are financially eligible for the legal aid services sought and that their case meets the applicable merits criteria. Additionally, for ECF the individual will need to demonstrate that failure to grant legal aid would breach, or risk breaching, the individual's Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998), or any rights of the individual to the provision of legal services that are assimilated enforceable rights. Full details of the eligibility criteria for legal aid including links to the relevant legislation can be accessed via the LAA's website here for [civil legal aid](#), [criminal legal aid](#) and [ECF](#).

HM Courts and Tribunal Service does not have powers to grant legal aid save for in very narrow circumstances as set out in the [Criminal Legal Aid \(Determinations by a Court and Choice of Representatives\) Regulations 2013](#), none of which apply to enforcement cases against unauthorised development and encampments.

#### ■ **Offences against Children: Prisoners' Release**

**Alicia Kearns:** [\[23878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether any offenders who were convicted of child sexual abuse have been released early from prison since 5 July 2024.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Sex offences were automatically excluded from both the End of Custody Supervised Licence Scheme which ceased on 9 September 2024 and from the current SDS40 scheme.

#### ■ **Prisons: Construction**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20225 on Prisons: Construction, if she will list the four locations affected by the

nutrient neutrality rules; on what dates mitigation measures were resolved on the three sites referenced; and whether each of those three sites have full planning permission.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[22927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20225 on Prisons: Construction, what the status of the planning permission is for each site; and how many additional prison places are proposed in each location.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The below table shows the four Rapid Deployment Cell Programme locations that have been affected by nutrient neutrality:

NAME OF SITE	DATE PROVISIONAL NUTRIENT CREDIT CERTIFICATE RECEIVED	PLANNING PERMISSION STATUS	PROPOSED NUMBER OF PLACES
HMP Deerbolt	16/09/2024	Planning application not yet submitted	60
HMP Holme House	16/09/2024	Planning approved	21
HMP Kirklevington Grange	16/09/2024	Planning approved	152
HMP Bure	N/A - mitigation ongoing	Planning application not yet submitted	c.60

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

### ■ Government Bills: Impact Assessments

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[23890\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, if she will take steps with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that all Departments publish impact assessments to Bills when they are published at first reading.

**Lucy Powell:**

The Government is committed to ensuring Parliament has the information it needs to hold the Government to account and to understand the impact of legislation. When a bill is published the Explanatory Notes include information regarding any financial implications.

I have written to all members of Cabinet regarding their ministerial responsibilities to Parliament. Best practice guidance is also provided to departments through the Cabinet Office Guide to Making Legislation, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-making-legislation>.

Published impact assessments, including their date of publication, are available on the Parliament website ( <https://bills.parliament.uk/> ).

## ■ West Midlands Pension Fund

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22632\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, pursuant to her oral contribution of 12 December 2024, Official Report, column 1045, what discussions she has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (b) the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and (c) other Cabinet colleagues on the west midlands pension fund.

**Lucy Powell:**

As the Hon. Member will know from my correspondence with her, following the Business Question on the 12th December 2024, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the 20th December 2024 and asked that this matter be looked into.

I understand that the Hon. Member has now received an update from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on this matter.

## ■ Written Questions: Government Responses

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[23038\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of recent answers to Written Questions in the context of improving transparency in Government.

**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.

The Procedure Committee regularly monitors individual department's PQ performance, and recently published a report on department's performance in the 2023-24 session (available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/126/procedure-committee/publications/> ).

I look forward to working with the Committee on this and other matters.

I would encourage hon. Members to raise any specific issues they may have with myself and my office.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Foreign Investment in UK: Northern Ireland

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[23719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking with (a) the Northern Ireland Executive and (b) Invest NI to help promote Northern Ireland as an



inward investment opportunity during the forthcoming Open Golf Championship at Royal Portrush.

**Hilary Benn:**

Royal Portrush will stage the 153rd Open Golf Championship in 2025, providing another outstanding showcase for golf in Northern Ireland. The 148th Open, held at Royal Portrush nine years ago, became the biggest sporting event ever held in Northern Ireland, delivering a combined economic and media benefit of more than £100 million to the region.

I have asked my officials to contact Invest NI to discuss this. I would also encourage the Honourable Member to share any suggestions he has to enhance any existing investment promotion with the Department for Business and Trade.

The Growth mission is the number one priority of the Government. That is why we are working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to create a thriving, competitive and regionally balanced economy in Northern Ireland through increased investment, job creation, and higher living standards.

■ **Northern Ireland Office: Industrial Disputes**

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[23025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Hilary Benn:**

There are no ongoing industrial disputes within the Department or our arm's length bodies connected to the Department.

**SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

■ **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Cultural Heritage**

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[22754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) his Department and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Department is a customer of the Government Property Agency (GPA) in its office locations. Artwork that is displayed in these locations is owned by Government Art Collection which is part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. GPA is responsible for any heritage assets.

As separate entities, arm's-length body are responsible for artwork and heritage items that sit within their office locations, rather than with the Department.

#### ■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Industrial Disputes

**Nick Timothy:** [\[23024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Feryal Clark:**

There is currently no industrial dispute within DSIT or any of its Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). No Trade Union has a current mandate for industrial action in DSIT or its ALBs.

There are ongoing disputes between PCS Union and both G4S Security Company (G4S) and International Services System - Facilities Management Services (ISS). G4S and ISS provide facilities management services in DSIT offices and those of other Departments under a contract managed by Government Property Agency. Those disputes are a matter for the union and employers concerned.

#### ■ Facebook: LGBT+ People

**Sam Carling:** [\[23097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of recent changes to Meta guidelines on hateful conduct which allow Facebook users to refer to LGBT+ people as mentally ill.

**Feryal Clark:**

The government is aware of the changes Meta has made to its guidelines. This change does not affect the strong protections the Online Safety Act will bring in for UK users online. The Act will oblige all social media companies to remove illegal content and content harmful to children and will give adult users more control over the type of content they see, including that which is hateful or abusive.

#### ■ Mobile Phones: Boston and Skegness

**Richard Tice:** [\[23054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help improve mobile phone signal coverage in rural areas of Boston and Skegness constituency; and what plans he has to ensure that (a) residents and (b) businesses in those areas receive reliable mobile connectivity.

**Chris Bryant:**

I have raised my concerns about the reporting of mobile connectivity with Ofcom, but according to Ofcom's Connected Nations report (published on 5 December 2024) 99% of the Boston and Skegness constituency has 4G geographic coverage from all four mobile operators, and that 5G is available from at least one operator outside 99% of all premises.

The Government wants all areas of the UK, including Boston and Skegness constituency, to benefit from good quality mobile coverage. Our ambition is for all populated areas to have higher-quality standalone 5G by 2030.

We work closely with the mobile industry and are committed to ensuring we have the right policy and regulatory framework to support investment and competition in the market

**Patents****Chi Onwurah:**[\[23750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the SEPs Resource Hub launched by the IPO in October 2024 on small and medium enterprises.

**Feryal Clark:**

From its launch on 22 July 2024 to 15 January 2025, the Standard Essential Patents (SEPs) Resource Hub has been accessed by 869 unique users. The IPO has sought feedback from stakeholders to assess whether they have accessed, understood, and implemented the Resource Hub's guidance. Stakeholders have indicated that the Hub has helped to reduce uncertainty around FRAND (fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory) licensing, particularly for small and medium enterprises, and encourage more informed negotiations between SEP holders and implementers. Further evaluation is being undertaken, both to help make improvements to the Hub and assess whether intended impacts have been achieved.

**Pornography: Internet****Rebecca Paul:**[\[23094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help ensure that pornographic sites remove content that promote a sexual interest in children.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Online Safety Act will place strict safety duties on user-to-user online platforms, including pornography-sharing sites, to proactively tackle any child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) content on their services. These sites need to start assessing for CSEA and other illegal content risks now. Their duties to tackle this content are scheduled to fully take effect this spring.

**■ Project Gigabit: Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe****David Chadwick:**[\[22837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much and what proportion of (a) Project Gigabit funding has been (i) spent on and (ii) allocated for and (b) additional funding announced in the press notice entitled Hundreds of thousands of Brits in rural villages and towns to benefit from UK government broadband boost, published on 7 January 2025, has been allocated for projects in Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe constituency.

**Chris Bryant:**

Project Gigabit funding is not allocated at a constituency or regional level. Instead, it is targeted at premises across the UK that need it most, specifically those outside of suppliers' commercial plans.

The latest Project Gigabit contracts announced on 7 January 2025 do not cover Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe as eligible premises in the constituency have already been included in an earlier Project Gigabit contract with Openreach. This contract is currently expected to deliver gigabit-capable connections to approximately 3,600 premises in the constituency.

To date, over £1 million in public subsidy has been spent in the Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe constituency through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and its previous iterations, passing nearly 800 premises with gigabit-capable broadband. This includes top-up funding from Welsh Government. Additionally, almost 6,700 premises across the constituency have received a gigabit-capable connection through the government's Superfast and GigaHubs programmes. We do not hold constituency-level data of spend for these schemes.

**■ Regulatory Innovation Office: Operating Costs****Sir John Hayes:**[\[22562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the annual running costs of the Regulatory Innovation Office.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO) is the Government's key tool for advancing regulatory innovation. The RIO draws on from core existing functions like the Regulatory Horizons Council (RHC) and the Regulators' Pioneers Fund (RPF). The Government will continue to evaluate timelines, costs, legal considerations, and objectives to ensure the RIO aligns with our transformative goals and delivers effective regulatory solutions.

## ■ Science: Research

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[22782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the incoming US presidency on scientific research in the UK.

**Feryal Clark:**

The US is our biggest research partner. We expect this to continue. The UK's thriving scientific ecosystem make us a natural and leading collaborator for the US research community. The UK and US have a deep scientific partnership which supports the UK's economic growth agenda. The Government looks forward to continuing to build on our strong existing bilateral commitments on research, which advance the frontiers of science, research and innovation to shape the technologies of the future.

## ■ UK Research and Innovation: Staff

**Chi Onwurah:**

[\[23744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 27 December 2024 to Question 20613 on UK Research and Innovation: Staff, what are the duties of regionally-organised business growth advisers; and who pays their salaries.

**Feryal Clark:**

Regionally organised business growth advisors (also known as innovation and growth specialists or scaleup directors) provide a comprehensive spectrum of innovation and commercial expertise to high-potential small to medium-sized innovation-driven companies. They help clients tackle priorities such as improving the innovation process, forging international business collaborations, becoming investment ready, and structuring for growth. Additionally, they act as a gateway to UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) range of support and significant regional, national, and international innovation resources.

The salaries of these business growth advisors are funded by Innovate UK, which is part of UKRI.

## SCOTLAND

### ■ Scotland Office: Industrial Disputes

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[23026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Ian Murray:**

The Scotland Office does not employ staff directly. All staff that join do so on an assignment, loan or secondment from other Government bodies, principally the Scottish Government and the Ministry of Justice, who remain the employers.

There are currently no ongoing industrial disputes with the Ministry of Justice or the Scottish Government employees.

**TRANSPORT**■ **Active Travel: Finance**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[23565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the second stage of the process evaluation of the Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 will take place.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department recently published both stages 1 and 2 of the Active Travel Fund tranche 2 process evaluation. Active Travel England will continue to work with the University of Westminster and Sustrans to consider further evaluation of government investment in active travel and the impact of interventions to encourage more walking, wheeling and cycling.

■ **Aviation: Carbon Emissions**

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[22567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of the annual running costs of the Jet Zero Taskforce.

**Mike Kane:**

The Jet Zero Taskforce convenes government and stakeholders from across the UK aviation sector to identify, and advise on, unblocking the key barriers in delivering greener aviation. Membership of the Taskforce is on a voluntary basis and there are no paid positions. Administrative running costs are minimal.

■ **Blackwall Tunnel and Silverstone Tunnel: Tolls**

**Mr Louie French:** [\[23929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the upcoming Blackwall and Silvertown tunnel tolls on congestion at the Dartford crossing.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor and TfL is responsible for assessing any impact of tolls on the Blackwall and Silvertown tunnels on congestion in the area. However, given the additional capacity provided by the Silvertown Tunnel and that for most of the day the charges for cars, vans and lorries at the Blackwall and Silvertown

Tunnels will be less than those at the Dartford Crossing, the Department expects minimal changes in total demand at the Dartford Crossing when tolling begins

### ■ Colne-Skipton Railway Line

**Jonathan Hinder:** [\[24054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 6 January 2020 to Question 492 on Colne-Skipton Railway Line, whether her Department has completed the further feasibility work.

**Jonathan Hinder:** [\[24055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of restoring the Skipton to Colne rail route.

**Simon Lightwood:**

All feasibility work relating to the proposed reinstatement of the Skipton-Colne line has been completed. While there is a strong strategic case for improving connectivity between East Lancashire and the Leeds city region, the scheme is currently unaffordable due to its high capital and operating costs. No DfT funding has been allocated for further development.

### ■ Delivery Services and Taxis: Insurance

**Luke Akehurst:** [\[23547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what (a) insurance requirements and (b) enforcement mechanisms are in place for (a) private hire and (b) delivery drivers.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

All drivers must have the correct insurance cover for the purpose they are using their vehicle for, and the police may check this when stopping a vehicle.

The Government takes uninsured driving seriously and tackles this through Continuous Insurance Enforcement (CIE), a scheme where the Motor Insurers' Bureau and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency collaborate to identify uninsured drivers; police enforcement on the road and through Operation Tutelage.

### ■ Department for Transport: Cultural Heritage

**Nick Timothy:** [\[22753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department, (ii) each of its arm's length bodies and (iii) railway stations.

**Mike Kane:**

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

**■ Department for Transport: Industrial Disputes****Nick Timothy:**[\[23023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) their Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to their Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

**Mike Kane:**

No recognised trade union currently holds a mandate to call industrial action in the Department for Transport or its Executive Agencies.

Members of PCS and Prospect unions in the Civil Aviation Authority have voted to take industrial action in a dispute over pay. The CAA is a statutory corporation and a public corporation of the Department for Transport. The number of staff potentially involved in the dispute is approximately 1,600, although it is estimated that 22% of staff are members of these unions.

PCS has called for a two-day strike commencing on 16 January followed by an overtime ban and work to rule.

Prospect has called for an overtime ban and work to rule commencing on 20 January.

Ministers look forward to a speedy resolution of this dispute and note that discussions between CAA management and unions are continuing. The pay of employees of the CAA is wholly a matter for the organisation itself.

**■ East Coast Main Line: North East****Luke Akehurst:**[\[23044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of planned East Coast Main Line timetable change in December 2025 on local rail services in (a) County Durham and (b) the North East.

**Simon Lightwood:**

An assessment suggested Chester-le-Street calls on Trans Pennine Express be increased to hourly services, which have now been implemented. As well as the LNER London to Newcastle trains be increased from two trains per hour to three trains per hour, now scheduled to start from December 2025.

Darlington should retain its two trains per hour to London by LNER and Durham should retain its one train per hour to London by LNER, both of which have been confirmed.

Other benefits to the North-east identified for introduction include more local trains north of Newcastle.

Network Rail is modelling the timetable to enable industry to focus on actions to ensure the timetable can be delivered reliably.



## ■ Great Western Railway

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[24091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with representatives of Great Western Railway since 29 November 2024.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Secretary of State has not met with Great Western Railway representatives since 29 November 2024, however on 12 December the Rail Minister met with representatives of both Great Western Railway and Network Rail to ensure they are progressing their plans to improve services for passengers.

## ■ Members: Correspondence

**Mr Will Forster:**

[\[23242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will take steps to respond to the letter from Liberal Democrat hon. Members on the nationalisation of South Western Railway.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Rail Minister replied to this letter on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

## ■ Public Transport: Disability and Special Educational Needs

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[24090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve public transportation options for children with special education needs and disabilities that are in further education.

**Simon Lightwood:**

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 as they move into adult life.

Local authorities are responsible for transport to education and training for 16-19 year olds. Post-16 transport guidance requires local authorities to make the necessary transport arrangements or provide financial support to ensure young people can participate in education or training. The needs of young people with SEND should be specifically considered and the arrangements put in place for each group must be documented in local authority transport policy statements.

In addition to their statutory responsibilities, many local authorities do offer some form of subsidised transport which, combined with the 16-19 bursary, has been intended to provide financial support to students from low-income households. These decisions are best made locally, in consideration of local needs, the resources available and other local circumstances.

With regard to public transport options more widely, the government wants everyone who needs it, including children and young people with SEND, to have access to

public transport and is committed to improving services, so they are more inclusive and enable disabled people to travel safely, confidently and with dignity.

The government's reforms to bus services typify this. On 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

### ■ **Railway Stations: Disability**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[23320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will take steps to help ensure rail stations are step free.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Since April 2024, step free upgrades at 13 stations have been completed, with a further 18 due to be completed by April 2025. This will be the most stations completed in one year since the programme started in 2006. This Government is committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and recognises the social and economic benefits this brings to communities.

### ■ **Railways**

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[23563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many open access applications (a) were approved in 2024 and (b) are awaiting a decision from the Office of Rail and Road.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Office of Rail and Road has confirmed to us that in 2024 they approved 2 applications from Open Access operators to provide completely new services and approved a further 8 applications from existing Open Access operators to either continue or make small-scale amendments to existing services.

The Office of Rail and Road is currently considering 13 applications from Open Access operators. Details of all decisions and live applications are published on the Office of Rail and Road's website.

### ■ **Railways: Concessions**

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[23561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of the proportion of rail journeys eligible for discounts through the 2025 Rail Sale.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Over two million tickets at discounts of up to 50 per cent are available for purchase as part of the Rail Sale. Train operating companies have decided on a commercial basis, the proportion of tickets available at discounted prices on their services.

## ■ Railways: Passengers

**Peter Fortune:**

[23221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation on Benchmarking operators' performance in rail passenger assistance, published on 16 December 2024.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR), like the Department for Transport, follows Government accessibility standards for its online content -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>.

ORR outlines the steps it takes to make content on accessible in its accessibility statement <https://www.orr.gov.uk/accessibility-statement>. The statement also sets out how users can request alternative versions of website content; provide feedback on website accessibility; or make complaints about the accessibility of website content.

For the Benchmarking operators' performance in rail passenger assistance consultation, <https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-consultations/benchmarking-operators-performance-rail-passenger-assistance>, ORR has provided alternative versions of the consultation document (including larger print and easy read versions) and alternative ways to respond (online form, email, post, easy read form).

## ■ Refineries: Grangemouth

**Euan Stainbank:**

[23039]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if the Jet Zero Taskforce Group will make an assessment of the potential merits of transitioning Grangemouth into a Sustainable Aviation Fuel facility.

**Mike Kane:**

This government, along with the Scottish Government, has put in place support to help workers to find new, skilled jobs, signed the £100m Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal, and funded Project Willow to find a viable long-term future for the site. This work includes consideration of potential production of Sustainable Aviation Fuel on the site amongst other options.

## ■ Road Works

**Lewis Cocking:**

[R] [23509]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many street works carried out under emergency procedures she considers as evidence of misuse.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department have examined data from our Street Manager digital service and spoken to industry representatives and found no evidence of misuse. Emergency works are needed to deal with danger to life and urgent works are needed, for

example, to repair leaks, restore customer connections, and repair dangerous potholes. The Government believes, however, that there is scope to improve how such works are managed and communicated to road users and we are working with the sector to develop proposals to address this.

**Lewis Cocking:**

[R] [\[23510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the utilities industry on minimising disruption caused by street works.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department for Transport works closely with industry stakeholders, including utility companies, as we continue to review our legislation, statutory guidance and guidance, to identify areas where the regime can be improved to minimise the impact of street works. We have recently announced to the industry that we will be clamping down on disruptive works by doubling fixed penalty notices for utility companies who fail to comply with rules and extending charges for works that overrun into weekends.

As more highway authorities are progressing with their applications to operate lane rental schemes to target the most disruptive works on our roads, my Department have been engaging with utility companies directly as part of a series of regional visits. Utility companies have also been invited, along with a range of other stakeholders, to take part in a consultation on proposals to improve and simplify the lane rental application process.

## ■ Roads: Closures

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[23562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many roads were closed during flooding in (a) Bedfordshire, (b) the East of England and (c) nationally in (i) 2024 and (ii) the latest period for which data is available.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department recognises the profound importance of our country's road network in moving people, goods, and services around the country. The impact of closing roads will vary greatly depending on the roads in question and on the scale and severity of the flooding.

The Government does not keep centralised lists of local road closures during periods of severe weather and flooding, either in Bedfordshire or nationally. These are matters for local highway authorities.

Bedford Council and Central Bedfordshire Council, as the relevant local highway authorities for Bedfordshire, are responsible for the management of their respective local networks, including making operational network decisions in the event of severe weather events including flooding.

On a national basis, management of the English highway network is the responsibility of over 150 highway authorities, who make operational decisions based on the scope and severity of severe weather affecting their area.

**TREASURY****■ Agriculture: Employers' Contributions****Sir John Hayes:**[\[23118\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of increases in employer National Insurance contributions on agricultural businesses.

**James Murray:**

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) was published alongside the introduction of Bill containing the changes to employer NICs. The TIIN sets out the impact of the policy on the exchequer; the economic impacts of the policy; and the impacts on individuals, businesses, civil society organisations and an overview of the equality impacts.

The Chancellor has decided to protect the smallest employers by increasing the Employment Allowance to £10,500, and removing the £100,000 eligibility threshold, meaning all eligible employers benefit. This means that next year, 865,000 employers – including small farms who employ staff - will pay no NICs at all. More than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package.

**■ Business Rates and Employers' Contributions****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[22928\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential cumulative impact of the (a) increase in National Insurance contributions, (b) changes to the level of retail, hospitality and leisure rate business relief from 2025-26 and (c) changes to the business rate surcharge on properties above £500,000 Rateable Value from 2026-27.

**James Murray:**

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

The Government recognises the need to protect the smallest employers which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year.

A Tax Information and Impact Note that covers the employer NICs changes was published by HMRC on 13 November 2024.

Without any government intervention, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief would have ended entirely in April 2025, creating a cliff-edge for businesses. Instead, the Government has decided to offer a 40 per cent discount to RHL properties up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business in 2025-26 and frozen the small business multiplier.

From 2026-27 we intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties with rateable values below £500,000. This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so we intend to introduce a higher rate on the most valuable properties on 2026-27 - those with rateable values of £500,000 and above. These represent less than one per cent of all properties, but capturing the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants.

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025.

Tax policy and legislation is not subject to the Better Regulation Framework Guidance which requires an Impact Assessment to accompany policy decisions. Nevertheless, when the new multipliers are set at Budget 2025, HM Treasury intends to publish analysis of the effects of the new multiplier arrangements.

The Non-Domestic Ratings Bill sets out the parameters within which the government proposes the multipliers would be set by Treasury regulations.

## ■ Business Rates: Tax Yields

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[22930]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16945 on Business Rates, if she will make an estimate of business rates receipts for (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26 for England only.

**James Murray:**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) publish non-domestic ratings receipts data and forecasts for the financial year ahead in England. As such, projections for non-domestic rates income for 2025-26 will be published in due course by MHCLG.

For 2024-25, local authorities estimate the non-domestic rating income to be £26.3 billion: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-non-domestic-rates-collected-by-councils-in-england-forecast-2024-to-2025/national-non-domestic-rates-collected-by-councils-in-england-forecast-for-2024-to-2025>

## ■ Credit Unions

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[23333]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the number of credit unions operating in (a) London and (b) England.

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[23334]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to increase the number of credit unions operating in England.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government has made clear its strong support for the credit union sector, recognising the value that credit unions bring to their members in local communities across the country in providing savings products and affordable credit.

The Chancellor announced new measures to support the growth of the credit union and mutuals sector in her Mansion House speech on 14 November. This included publishing a call for evidence on the potential to reform common bonds for credit unions in Great Britain, asking the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) to produce a report on the mutuals landscape by the end of 2025, and welcoming the establishment of an industry-led Mutual and Co-operative Business Council. Together, these actions reinforce the Government's commitment to support the credit union and mutuals sector, and help it grow to drive innovation and economic growth across the country.

The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) publishes quarterly statistics relating to credit unions in the United Kingdom. According to this latest data, there are currently 140 credit unions operating in England. Whilst HM Treasury does not hold data on the number of credit unions operating in London, all registered mutuals are listed publicly on the Mutuals Public Register, which is managed by the Financial Conduct Authority.

## ■ Cryptocurrencies: Regulation

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[23721\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has plans for a comprehensive financial services regulatory regime for cryptoassets in the UK.

**Emma Reynolds:**

On 21 November 2024, the Government confirmed that it will proceed with creating a new financial services regulatory regime for cryptoassets. This regime will be in line with the proposals published by HM Treasury in October 2023.

## ■ Debts: Advisory Services

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[23429\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of Government support for debt advisory services.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government currently provides national and community-based debt advice services, through the Money and Pensions Service, to hundreds of thousands of individuals and families in need across England. The Government also provides funding for debt advice in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As debt advice is a devolved matter, responsibility for delivering these services rests with those devolved governments.

Funding levels for both the Money and Pensions Service and the devolved governments are regularly reviewed to reflect demand, inflation, and evolving needs.

## ■ Employers' Contributions: Victim Support Schemes

**Mims Davies:**

[\[22941\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of changes in the level of National Insurance contributions on victims support services.

**James Murray:**

The Government publishes Tax Information and Impact Notes (TIINs) for tax policy changes. TIINs give a clear explanation of the policy objective and an assessment of the impacts including on the Exchequer, individuals and families, businesses including civil society organisations and others. The TIIN for the employer NICs changes was published on 13 November 2024.

## ■ Employers' Contributions: Women

**Mims Davies:**

[\[22940\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions on women-owned businesses.

**James Murray:**

The Government publishes Tax Information and Impact Notes (TIINs) for tax policy changes. TIINs give a clear explanation of the policy objective and an assessment of the impacts including on the Exchequer, individuals and families, businesses including civil society organisations and others. The TIIN for the employer NICs changes was published on 13 November 2024.

The Government is partnering with business to maximise women's contribution to the economy. In line with the ambition of the Invest in Women Taskforce to expand access to funding for female entrepreneurs, the British Business Bank is investing £50 million in women-led funds. HMT's Women in Finance Charter is supporting financial services firms to make the most of their female talent.

## ■ Energy: Investment

**Harriet Cross:**

[\[23680\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she had discussions with industry stakeholders at the International Investment Summit on investment in the UK's strategic energy infrastructure.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Chancellor met with a range of domestic and international investors with current and prospective investments in the UK's strategic energy infrastructure at the International Investment Summit.



## ■ Foreign Relations: China

**Priti Patel:** [\[22601\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the potential impact of closer economic ties with China on (a) the UK economy and (b) public finances.

**James Murray:**

The Chancellor visited Beijing and Shanghai for the 2025 UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue. The government published a press statement and policy outcomes paper on Saturday 11 January which lists the outcomes for British businesses and the UK economy. The press release and paper can be found [here](#).

The Chancellor also published a written ministerial statement about her visit to China on the morning of Monday 13 January (found [here](#)) and delivered an oral statement to the House of Commons on Tuesday 14 January.

## ■ Fraud: Coronavirus

**Phil Brickell:** [\[22789\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much HM Revenue and Customs staff time and resource was dedicated to recovering funds from covid-19 (a) business relief and (b) procurement-related fraud in the latest period for which data is available.

**James Murray:**

HMRC remain committed to COVID-19 scheme compliance activity and will continue to prioritise and pursue the most serious cases of abuse.

Part (a):

The main COVID-19 business support schemes that were administered by HMRC were the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Eat Out to Help Out (EOHO). We have interpreted your request for details relating to business relief to relate to these grant schemes.

From tax year 2020/21 to date, HMRC estimate that c.3,500 staff have been deployed to recover overpayments on the COVID-19 business support schemes administered by HMRC (where one staff member is the equivalent of one full time staff member for one year).

Part (b):

HMRC has no functions in relation to the procurement processes and contracts awarded in relation to key healthcare related equipment and supplies. As such, HMRC would not generally investigate whether fraud has been committed in relation to the actual procurement or execution of such contracts, except where there was an ongoing investigation undertaken by other Law Enforcement Agencies concerning offences relating to one or more of HMRC's functions, such as tax offences.

HMRC's only involvement in stand-alone fraud investigations that might arise from procurement would be if there were issues in relation to one or more of HMRC's functions, such as tax offences.

HMRC conducts thousands of civil and criminal compliance actions each year. A number of these relate to tax offences suspected of having been committed by those seeking and fulfilling government contracts relating to the procurement and onward supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and similar products during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work is undertaken across various teams within HMRC's Customer Compliance Group.

### ■ Free Schools: Business Rates

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22649\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether free schools will be affected by changes to charitable business rate relief for schools.

**James Murray:**

The Government is legislating to remove the eligibility of private schools in England to business rates charitable rate relief.

The Government has defined a "private school" as a school at which full time education is provided for pupils of compulsory school age, where fees or other consideration are payable for that provision of full-time education.

Legally, free schools are academies so do not charge fees for education. Therefore, they will not be impacted by the removal of charitable rate relief from private schools.

### ■ Income Tax: Tax Allowances

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[23717\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of how many full time employees will not be paying income tax when the freeze on personal tax thresholds ends in April 2028.

**James Murray:**

At the National Minimum Wage rates effective from April 2025 and working 35 hours per week a full-time employee over 21 would earn £22,222.22 –which is above the Personal Allowance of £12,570.

Therefore, when the freeze on personal tax thresholds ends in April 2028 a full-time employee earning at least the minimum wage would have pay more than the personal allowance and thus would be expected to pay Income Tax.

This government is committed to keeping taxes as low as possible for working people while ensuring fiscal responsibility, which is why it will not extend the freeze on personal tax thresholds, allowing them to rise with inflation the following year.

### ■ Mortgages: Pylons

**Samantha Niblett:** [\[23571\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with mortgage lenders on ensuring mortgage offers are maintained for properties near electricity pylons, in the context of proposals to increase the number of electricity pylons.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The pricing and availability of mortgages is a commercial decision for mortgage lenders in which the Government does not intervene.

However, the Government is regularly in contact with mortgage lenders on all aspects of their business, including the provision of finance to different cohorts of borrowers.

The UK also benefits from a competitive mortgage market, with a wide variety of products available. Any prospective borrower should speak to a mortgage broker, who will be able to assist them in finding the best possible product for their circumstances.

**■ Palliative Care: Finance****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[23903\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the level of Government funding to (a) hospices and (b) the palliative care sector.

**Darren Jones:**

The Chancellor and I work closely with the Health Secretary on issues related to health and social care funding.

The Government announced in December 2024 that we are supporting the hospice sector with a £100 million capital funding boost for adult and children's hospices to ensure they have the best physical environment for care, as well as £26 million in revenue funding to support children and young people's hospices. This will help to ensure that hospices in England can continue to deliver the highest quality end of life care possible for their patients, families, and loved ones.

In England, integrated care boards are responsible for the commissioning of palliative and end of life care services to meet the needs of their local populations. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

**■ Pensioners: Tax Allowances****Ben Maguire:**[\[23105\]](#)

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

**James Murray:**

The Government is committed to keeping taxes as low as possible for pensioners while ensuring fiscal responsibility, which is why it is not extending the freeze on personal tax thresholds that was implemented by the previous government, and is instead allowing them to rise with inflation from April 2028.

At Autumn Budget, the Government announced that the basic and new State Pension will increase by 4.1% from April 2025. This means those on a full new State Pension will receive an additional £470 a year.

**■ Pensions: Statistics****James Wild:**[\[22986\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to National Audit Office's report entitled, public service pensions, published on 19 March 2021, whether her Department plans to publish updated statistics on the balancing payments made to pensions schemes.

**Darren Jones:**

Figures showing the net Exchequer balancing payments for unfunded Public Service Pension Schemes (PSPS), along with details on contribution income and scheme expenditure, are regularly published as part of the OBR's Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO). The latest publication is part of the October 2024 EFO, in the table labelled "October 2024 Economic and fiscal outlook – detailed forecast tables: expenditure": <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2024/>

**■ Public Expenditure: Environment Protection****Munira Wilson:**[\[22679\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will update the Green Book to allow for the valuation of the reduced carbon footprint of UK produced materials as opposed to imported ones.

**Darren Jones:**

The Green Book has supplementary guidance on the valuation of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. This is found here:  
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65aadd020ff90c000f955f17/valuation-of-energy-use-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions-for-appraisal.pdf>

That supplementary guidance notes that appraisals should consider the greenhouse gas emissions content of all of the materials that are used to implement a proposal. This applies both to materials produced in the UK, as well as those imported from abroad.

**■ Public Sector: Workplace Pensions****Richard Fuller:**[\[22895\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish the sources of funding for each public sector pension scheme including balancing payments made by her Department for each fiscal year between 2020-21 and 2023-24.

**Darren Jones:**

Figures showing the net Exchequer balancing payments for unfunded Public Service Pension Schemes (PSPS), along with details on contribution income and scheme expenditure, are regularly published as part of the OBR's Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO), including outturn figures for the previous fiscal year. For example, the March 2022 EFO includes Exchequer balancing figures for each major PSPS for 2020-21 in the table labelled "March 2022 Economic and fiscal outlook –

supplementary fiscal tables: expenditure": [Economic and fiscal outlook - March 2022 - Office for Budget Responsibility](#) The latest publication is included in the October 2024 EFO.

#### ■ Rachel Reeves: Self-assessment

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[22998\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 7 January 2025 to Question 21387 on Rachel Reeves: Self-assessment, for what reason she does not plan to publish her tax return.

**James Murray:**

I refer the hon member to the answer given on the 7 January 2025 to UIN 21387.

#### ■ Tax Allowances

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[22999\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her Department's definition of a tax break is.

**James Murray:**

'Tax breaks' are commonly understood to be policies that mean taxpayers either pay less tax through exemptions or deductions, or get tax back through credits or repaid in another way.

#### ■ Tourism: Taxation

**Steve Darling:** [\[23941\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of a tourism tax on the tourist industry.

**James Murray:**

We have no plans to introduce a tourism tax. The Government keeps all tax policy under review.

#### ■ Treasury: Cultural Heritage

**Nick Timothy:** [\[22743\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department, (ii) HMRC, (iii) the Valuation Office Agency and (iv) the other arm's length bodies in her Department.

**James Murray:**

There has been no change in HM Treasury's management of artwork or heritage assets since the previous administration.

The responsibility for creating policy and guidance for artwork sits with HMRC, the VOA and each individual arm's length body, rather than HMT.

**■ Treasury: Employers' Contributions****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[22929\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether any private sector companies contracted to her Department will receive increased payments for the increase in employer National Insurance contributions.

**James Murray:**

Reviewing contractual payment provisions is dependent on the applicable terms and conditions of individual agreements. Supplier requests for such pricing reviews would be considered as part of standard contract management practice.

**■ Treasury: Media****John Cooper:** [\[23108\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20489 on Treasury: Media, which contractors were used for the spending on media training; and which Ministers received the media training.

**James Murray:**

The media training was provided by Freud Communications. The Ministers who received the training were the former Economic Secretary, the Exchequer Secretary and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

**WALES****■ Wales Office: Cultural Heritage****Nick Timothy:** [\[22757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies; and what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the publication entitled Public Commemoration in Wales: Guidance for Public Bodies, published by the Welsh Government in March 2024.

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

There has been no change in the Wales Office's management of artwork or heritage assets since the previous administration. The Wales Office does not have any arm's length bodies.

While we have made no formal assessment of the implications of the publication 'Public Commemoration in Wales: Guidance for Public Bodies', the Wales Office would consult the guidance, as appropriate, in the context of any activity led by the department on future public commemorations in Wales.

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES****■ Equal Pay: Ethnic Groups****Sojan Joseph:**[\[24028\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if her Department will publish a timeline for the introduction of mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting.

**Seema Malhotra:**

As set out in the King's Speech in July, the government is committed to introducing mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers. These measures will be part of the upcoming Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, which will be published in draft in this parliamentary session

We will shortly be consulting on our proposals to help us shape the legislation and will announce further details on timing in due course.

**■ Equality: Pupils****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[22932\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, pursuant to the Answer of 6 September 2024 to Question 2316 on Equality, whether the socio-economic duty will apply to local education authority decisions on (a) parents with children joining the state system from independent schools and (b) other school admissions.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Government is committed to commencing the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010. The duty will require specified public bodies, when making strategic decisions, to consider actively how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage. Public bodies specified by the duty include county and district councils, the Greater London Authority, and London Borough councils. We will support public bodies to ensure that they have clarity as to how to meet the duty in readiness for commencement.

**■ Harassment: Women****Jim Shannon:**[\[22266\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on protecting women from online harassment.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

Equalities Ministers have regular discussions with their colleagues across Government about tackling online harassment as part of the Government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. These include the Safer Streets Mission Board and Violence Against Women and Girls Ministerial meetings.

**WORK AND PENSIONS****■ Department for Work and Pensions: Cultural Heritage**

**Nick Timothy:** [\[22751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to decolonise the (a) artwork and (b) heritage assets in (i) her Department and (ii) each of its arm's length bodies.

**Andrew Western:**

There has been no change in the Department's management of artwork or heritage assets since the previous administration.

As separate entities, the responsibility for creating policy and guidance for artwork sits with each individual Arm's Length Body, rather than with the Department.

**■ Employment Schemes**

**Helen Whately:** [\[22656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many more people she expects to be in employment as a result of proposals in the Get Britain Working White Paper.

**Alison McGovern:**

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11th December to question number PQ [17573](#).

**■ Household Support Fund: Pensioners**

**Helen Whately:** [\[22657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department is collecting data about use of the Household Support Fund to support pensioners who are no longer in receipt of the winter fuel payment.

**Alison McGovern:**

The Department for Work and Pensions publishes management information on the Household Support Fund, including details of the proportion of funding spent on households with pensioners, as well as the proportion spent on energy and water.

The latest management information, covering the scheme running from April 2023 to March 2024, is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-4-management-information-for-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024>.

Local Authorities have the discretion to design their own local schemes within the parameters of the guidance and grant determination that the Department for Work and Pensions have set out for the fund.



**■ Pension Credit****Helen Whately:** [\[22342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the next Pension Credit applications and awards dataset will be published.

**Torsten Bell:**

The next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

**Euan Stainbank:** [\[22410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of Pension Credit at tackling financial hardship among older people; and what steps she is taking to improve levels of (a) awareness and (b) uptake of Pension Credit among (i) eligible groups and (ii) women born in the 1950s that were impacted by changes to the State Pension age.

**Torsten Bell:**

Pension Credit was introduced specifically to help address pensioner poverty. It provides a vital safety net for low-income pensioners by guaranteeing a minimum level of income. For a single pensioner this Standard Minimum Guarantee (SMG) is currently set at £218.15 per week; for pensioner couples it is £332.95. The Government is absolutely committed to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement. Subject to Parliamentary approval, in April 2025 the SMG will increase by 4.1% and mean that the SMG for a single pensioner will be £227.10 per week and for a pensioner couple it will be £346.60 - an increase in both cash and real terms.

Receipt of Pension Credit also opens the door to a whole range of other financial support, including help with rent, council tax, fuel bills and a free TV licence for those over 75. That's why the Government is taking significant steps to raise awareness and maximise the take-up of Pension Credit.

Our campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running since September and is aimed at all eligible pensioners, including of course, women born in the 1950s. It has been running on TV, radio, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, on YouTube, on advertising screens, including on GP and Post Office screens as well as in the press. The latest phase of the campaign ran from 8 November and was aimed at friends and family - especially adult children of eligible pensioners - asking them to tell people they know about Pension Credit, encourage them to check their eligibility, as well as help them make a claim.

In November we also wrote to around 120,000 pensioners who were in receipt of Housing Benefit but not Pension Credit. We invited these pensioners to claim Pension Credit in time to make a successful backdated Pension Credit claim and qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment.

In order to promote Pension Credit through as many channels as possible, we have also engaged with key stakeholders and partners, including other government

departments, local councils, housing associations, community groups, local libraries and service providers as well as charities and third sector organisations.

Over the coming weeks, as part of the annual State Pension uprating exercise, around 11 million pensioners will receive a leaflet promoting Pension Credit along with their State Pension uprating letter.

**Danny Kruger:** [\[22716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average cost to the public purse is of (a) a Pension Credit claimant, (b) their council tax discounts and (c) other passport benefits.

**Torsten Bell:**

Data on Pension Credit award amounts is routinely published and made publicly available via [DWP Stat-xplore](#). At May 2024, the average weekly Pension Credit award amount was £82.66. This figure does not include other operational and administrative costs, such as supporting customers and sending letters.

The Department does not hold data on Council Tax discount or the value of all passported benefits.

**Danny Kruger:** [\[22717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what passport benefits of what average value a Pension Credit claimant may be eligible to receive.

**Torsten Bell:**

Pension Credit claimants can receive passported benefits such as:

- Winter Fuel Payment;
- Housing Benefit for those who rent the property they live in;
- support for Mortgage Interest for those who own the property they live in;
- a Council Tax discount for those in England and Wales;
- a free TV licence for those aged 75 or over;
- help with NHS dental treatment, glasses, and transport costs for hospital appointments;
- help with heating costs through the Warm Home Discount Scheme;
- a discount on the Royal Mail redirection service for those moving house.

Information on passported benefits is available at: [Pension Credit: Overview - GOV.UK](#).

No estimate has been made of the average value of these benefits.

**Dr Ben Spencer:** [\[22983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Pension Credit applications her Department has received in each of the last 12 months; and how many such applications were processed within the 50 day target.

**Torsten Bell:**

*[Holding answer 15 January 2025]:* Pension Credit operational information is produced weekly. Please find data from 1 January 2024 up to the latest available data at end of week commencing 11 November 2024. This data is part of a longer time series published by the Department on 28 November 2024, which shows applications for Pension Credit received since 1 April 2024 up to 17 November 2024. Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK. The next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

<b>WEEK COMMENCING</b>	<b>PENSION CREDIT CLAIMS RECEIVED</b>
01 Jan 24	3,100
08 Jan 24	4,600
15 Jan 24	4,800
22 Jan 24	4,500
29 Jan 24	4,400
05 Feb 24	5,800
12 Feb 24	5,600
19 Feb 24	5,800
26 Feb 24	7,200
04 Mar 24	6,200
11 Mar 24	5,100
18 Mar 24	5,100
25 Mar 24	3,800
01 Apr 24	3,900
08 Apr 24	4,400
15 Apr 24	4,400
22 Apr 24	4,200
29 Apr 24	3,700
06 May 24	3,400
13 May 24	4,100
20 May 24	4,000

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<b>WEEK COMMENCING</b>	<b>PENSION CREDIT CLAIMS RECEIVED</b>
27 May 24	3,300
03 Jun 24	4,200
10 Jun 24	4,000
17 Jun 24	3,400
24 Jun 24	3,200
01 Jul 24	3,800
08 Jul 24	4,100
15 Jul 24	3,300
22 Jul 24	3,500
29 Jul 24	7,900
05 Aug 24	7,300
12 Aug 24	5,900
19 Aug 24	8,400
26 Aug 24	9,000
02 Sep 24	10,700
09 Sep 24	13,400
16 Sep 24	11,800
23 Sep 24	9,800
30 Sep 24	8,300
07 Oct 24	8,200
14 Oct 24	9,600
21 Oct 24	9,000
28 Oct 24	10,000
04 Nov 24	9,800
11 Nov 24	10,600

As per the publication of the [DWP annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#) (ARA), 77.7% of Pension Credit claims were processed within the

Department's planned timescales in the Financial Year 2023 to 2024. The next publication of the ARA will include claims processed in the Financial Year 2024 to 2025, which is due for publication in the summer.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[23266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people (a) made applications for Pension Credit and (b) were successful between 29 July 2024 and 21 December 2024.

**Torsten Bell:**

*[Holding answer 16 January 2025]:* Statistics on Pension Credit application volumes were published on 28 November 2024. This includes numbers of applications that were received, awarded and not awarded, from 1 April 2024 up to 17 November 2024. Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK.

Please note, the next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

#### ■ Pension Credit: Runcorn and Helsby

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[23427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the number of people that were (a) eligible for and (b) not in receipt of Pension Credit in Runcorn and Helsby constituency on 13 January 2025.

**Torsten Bell:**

The department does not hold this data. Information relating to Pension Credit eligibility is only available via take-up statistics. The latest available Pension Credit take-up statistics for Great Britain cover the financial year 2021 to 2022 and are available at: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-ending-2022). However, these statistics are only available at Great Britain level and cannot be broken down to smaller geographical areas.

#### ■ Pensions: Fraud

**James McMurdock:** [\[22554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support her Department is providing for victims of pension fraud schemes.

**Torsten Bell:**

Where fraud does occur, the Fraud Compensation Fund (FCF) compensates occupational pension schemes where there has been a loss in the value of the scheme assets due to fraud or dishonesty. Following payment of compensation to schemes, independently appointed trustees can then provide compensation to individual victims.

In addition, the Pensions Regulator (TPR) has robust powers to target mishandling of pension schemes and protect pension savers from losing out to fraud. MoneyHelper has guidance on its website to help identify, avoid, and report pension scams.

### ■ Pensions: Inflation

**Marie Goldman:** [\[22765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions letter on the Pension Protection Fund and Financial Assistance Scheme payments of 17 December 2024, what progress she has made on implementing the recommendations on inflation protection for pre-1997 pensions.

**Torsten Bell:**

The PPF and FAS rules on indexation have been the subject of much discussion. I am aware of the concerns surrounding the matter and understand the problems experienced by Defined Benefit pension scheme members adjusting to an income in retirement which may be less than they were expecting. I will continue to consider this issue over the coming months.

The Government is considering the Select Committee's valuable report and will respond fully to the report and recommendations later this year.

### ■ Pensions: Reviews

**Steve Darling:** [\[23525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her timeline is for completing the second pensions review.

**Torsten Bell:**

This government is committed to enabling tomorrow's pensioners to have security in retirement— which is why we announced the landmark Pensions Review days after coming into office in July.

The first phase focussed on boosting investment and economic growth and we are committed to a second phase focused on retirement adequacy. We will provide further details on the scope and timetable for the second phase in due course

### ■ Personal Independence Payment: Respiratory Diseases

**David Chadwick:** [\[23671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are receiving PIP as a result of having a lung condition; and whether breathlessness is taken into account when conducting a PIP assessment.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

In October 2024, there were 107,697 claimants with a respiratory disease who received Personal Independence Payment (PIP). These figures are for England and Wales only and exclude claimants with Special Rules for End of Life. This figure can

be found in Stat Xplore in the “PIP cases with Entitlement from 2019” table found here: [Stat-Xplore - Home](#).

Entitlement to PIP is assessed on the basis of the needs arising from a health condition or disability, rather than the health condition or disability itself. Individuals can be affected in different ways by the same condition and so the outcome of a PIP claim depends very much on individual circumstances.

PIP legislation requires decision makers to consider whether individuals can complete each assessment activity “safely, to an acceptable standard, repeatedly and in a reasonable time period”. These four components are known as the reliability criteria.

When determining whether an activity can be reliably carried out, symptoms such as breathlessness should be considered, as they may indicate that the activity cannot be done to an acceptable standard, repeatedly, or within a reasonable time period. The impact of completing one activity on the ability to complete others must also be considered.

#### ■ **Personal Independence Payment: Winter Fuel Payment**

**Richard Tice:**

[\[23061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of excluding people on Personal Independence Payment from eligibility for the winter fuel payment on their ability to meet energy costs.

**Torsten Bell:**

Given the substantial pressures faced by the public finances this year and next, the Government has had to make hard choices to bring the public finances back under control.

Winter Fuel Payments will continue to be paid to pensioner households with someone receiving Pension Credit or certain other income-related benefits. They will continue to be worth £200 for eligible households, or £300 for eligible households with someone aged over 80.

The Government also offers an array of support with energy costs for low-income groups 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).

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, to benefit under the scheme.

People 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.

The Home Upgrade Grant phase 2 provides energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon heating measures to low-income households living in the worst performing, off gas grid homes in England to tackle fuel poverty.

For those with long-term health conditions or disabilities, the “extra costs” disability benefits, including Personal Independence Payment, provide a tax free, non-income-related contribution towards the extra costs people with a long-term health condition can face, such as additional heating costs. They are paid in addition to any other benefits received.

These benefits also give rise to a disability addition in Pension Credit and other income-related benefits.

## ■ Sick Pay

**Llinos Medi:** [\[23948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of increasing the rate of Statutory Sick Pay.

**Alison McGovern:**

The Government reviews the rate of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) annually as part of the uprating process. We are committed to building our understanding of how our plans to strengthen SSP, announced in our Plan to Make Work Pay, will impact employers and employees alike.

Through the Employment Rights Bill we are removing the Waiting Period so that SSP is payable from the first day of sickness absence, and we are also removing the Lower Earnings Limit which will widen eligibility to the up to 1.3 million employees who are currently not entitled to SSP.

Many employers choose to go further than paying the statutory minimum and provide more financial support to their employees during a sickness absence. Around 60% of all employees eligible to receive such contractual sick pay. Those who need additional financial support while off sick may be able to receive more help through the welfare system such as Universal Credit, depending on their individual circumstances.

## ■ State Retirement Pensions

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[23268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people aged 80 and over are eligible for the additional £260 per year pension.

**Torsten Bell:**

*[Holding answer 16 January 2025]:* At the quarter ending May 2024, there were 87,299 people in total claiming a Category D pension, those in the UK and overseas. This is a non-contributory State Pension that is paid to those aged over 80 who have no State Pension or who receive an amount that is less than the Category D rate of



£101.55 a week (£105.70 after April 2025). There are also residency conditions that must be met in order to be eligible.

Source: [DWP Stat-Xplore](#).

## ■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

**Steve Darling:** [\[23034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of maladministration around communications of State Pension age changes on the six sample cases in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, HC 638, published on 21 March 2024.

**Torsten Bell:**

*[Holding answer 14 January 2025]:* The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman set out their assessment of the impact on the six sample complainants in the report published in March 2024. Our comments on the sample complainants can be found in our detailed report placed in the House library.

## ■ Universal Credit: Down's Syndrome and Specific Learning Difficulties

**Sir Julian Lewis:** [\[23247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether people previously diagnosed with (a) Down Syndrome and (b) other severe learning difficulties will be required to undergo a further assessment when their (i) personal independence payment and (ii) employment support allowance are migrated to universal credit.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

*[Holding answer 16 January 2025]:* People claiming Employment Support Allowance are being migrated to Universal Credit, but anyone on Personal Independence Payment will remain on it. Customers who move to UC following the receipt of a migration notice from ESA have their LCW or LCWRA moved with them to UC.

So, for the vast majority of cases there is no need for a new WCA.

The Work Capability Assessment is a functional assessment that applies to both UC & Employment and Support Allowance. Receipt of other benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) do not provide an automatic passport to LCW or LCWRA as the assessment criteria are different. Therefore, customers in receipt of PIP only, may be referred for a WCA if they declare a health condition when making their claim to Universal Credit.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payments: Pensioners

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[23196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support vulnerable pensioners during winter 2024-25, in the context of changes to the eligibility criteria for the winter fuel payment.

**Torsten Bell:**

The Government 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, the Warm Home Discount, and (in England & Wales) Cold Weather Payments.

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.

Our Pension Credit campaign has been successful in boosting applications by 145%, and thanks to the Pension Credit backdating rules, anyone who made a successful backdated claim by 21 December will also qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment.

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 three million households, including over one 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.

This support is all underpinned by this Government's commitment to the Triple Lock this Parliament and a 4.1% increase to the basic State Pension and the new State Pension this April. 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.

Low-income pensioners and others struggling with the cost of living should contact their local council to see what further support may be available to them, as they may be able to receive support from Council Tax Reduction, or through energy support programmes (such as the Homes Upgrade Grant and Energy Company Obligation) – or in England, through the Household Support Fund (a scheme providing discretionary support to those most in need towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water).

The Government is extending the Household Support Fund in England by a further year (until 31 March 2026), with funding of £742 million provided to enable this extension in England, plus additional funding for the devolved Governments to be spent at their discretion. This builds on the previous investment of £421 million to extend the fund from 1 October 2024 until 31 March 2025.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

#### ■ UK Soft Power Council

##### **Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Mr Hamish Falconer):** [\[HCWS369\]](#)

My honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Latin America and Caribbean (Baroness Chapman of Darlington) has today made the following statement:

I would like to update Parliament on the UK Government's approach to soft power. The global community faces some of the greatest challenges of our lifetime. Conflict across multiple continents, the climate and nature emergency, the threat of harms flowing from unregulated emerging technologies and their use by hostile states. Our rules-based international order, historically used to tackle these issues, is under attack. To meet these challenges, the UK must collaborate and take action.

Our offer to the world is unique: we are a beacon of democracy underpinned by a talented and independent judiciary. We boast internationally recognised cultural, creative and sporting sectors, vibrant in all four corners of our country and around the world. We have a world-class education system, resilient and revered financial and legal sectors, ground-breaking science, technology and research centres. The impact of the BBC World Service and British Council is unparalleled.

The spirit of the United Kingdom is built on tolerance, fairness, diversity and inclusivity, grounding our approach on values. The UK does not sit still, rather we continue to look at how we can do things differently and find innovative solutions to the problems we and the world face.

While others seek to weaponise their soft power, we seek to collaborate and forge partnerships: if we are to make progress on the challenges that we face, and create a world that is safer, fairer and more prosperous for all, we must engage the sectors, institutions and networks that together contribute to our success and best project those to the world.

It is no longer viable to rely solely on hard tools. A modern, dynamic, engaged Britain unlocks the power of our strongest assets.

We must use soft power to deliver hard goals.

#### **New Soft Power Council**

Today, my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I are launching a new UK Soft Power Council and will convene its inaugural meeting on 15 January.

For the first time, we are bringing together some of the most influential figures across our world-leading sectors in soft power and foreign policy to steer and advise Government.

This Council reflects the depth and breadth of our culture, creative, sports, education and science and technology sectors, and will tap into UK expertise on security, climate and nature, development, and our values and institutions.

This is not just an advisory group. The Soft Power Council will enable us to build stronger partnerships with external organisations at home and abroad, identify opportunities to strengthen our reach and reputation and shore up our influence for a generation.

Core to the Council's mission is the pursuit of economic growth, ensuring a coherent, strategic, approach to soft power that brings tangible economic benefits to citizens across the UK.

Together the Soft Power Council will help the UK Government shape and drive a new UK Soft Power Strategy that will deliver on our foreign policy priorities, bring momentum to campaigns that deploy our soft power and broaden the reach of the major soft power and foreign policy moments in the global calendar.

We look forward to inviting contributions from the full range of Parliamentarians to support this initiative.

Co-chaired by us as Secretaries of State, the members of the Soft Power Council are:

### Foreign Policy

GROWTH	DR LINDA YUEH EWAN VENTERS ROLAND RUDD	UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD; ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY CEO, HAUSER & WIRTH (FORMER CEO, FORTNUM & MASON) GLOBAL CO-CHAIR, FGS GLOBAL; CHAIR, TATE
Security	Gen Sir Nick Carter Ero Dr Comfort	Former Chief of the Defence Staff International Crisis Group
Europe	Mark Leonard Dr Parag Khanna	European Council on Foreign Relations AlphaGeo
Climate	Richard Deverell Dr Vijaya Ramachandran	Kew Gardens Breakthrough Institute
Development	Dr Sara Pantuliano	ODI Global

### Soft Power

CULTURE	DR TRISTRAM HUNT LORD MENDOZA FRAN HEGYI SCOTT MCDONALD	VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM HISTORIC ENGLAND EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL BRITISH COUNCIL
Creative	Tom Kieh Sir Peter Bazalgette	UK Music Royal College of Art
Sport	Dame Katherine Grainger Baroness Tanni Grey- Thompson Debbie Hewitt	UK Sport; University of Glasgow Sport Wales; UK Active; Duke of Edinburgh's Award Football Association
Education	Vivienne Stern	Universities UK
Values and Institutions	Patrick Stevens Anthony Smith Dame Linda Dobbs	Rule of Law Director, International Justice Development Westminster Foundation for Democracy Former UK High Court Judge
Media	Tom Fussell	BBC Studios
Tourism	Peter Gowers	Europcar; Former CEO, Travelodge
Science and Technology	Professor Helen McCarthy	Queens University Belfast; Chief Science & Technology Adviser, Northern Ireland

## PRIME MINISTER

### ■ Machinery of Government

**Prime Minister (Sir Keir Starmer):**

[\[HCWS368\]](#)

I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following Machinery of Government change.

On 10 October 2024, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced the creation of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority. I am today announcing that NISTA will be a joint unit of HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office. This change will bring infrastructure strategy and delivery together to address systemic challenges to growth, and combine the expertise and functions of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the National Infrastructure Commission.

To support this, responsibility for all of the Infrastructure and Project Authority's functions and responsibilities, including the Government's project delivery expertise and functions, and assurance reviews for the Government's largest projects, will move from the Cabinet Office to HM Treasury.

The Principal Accounting Officer for NISTA will be the HM Treasury Permanent Secretary. The lead Minister will be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

This change will be effective from 1 April 2025.