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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Seventh periodic report submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2021*

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General Information

1. The UK Government is grateful to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for providing its concluding observations prior to the submission of its seventh periodic report. As recommended by the Committee in paragraph 73 of its concluding observations, this report is a co-ordinated response to the CESCR and has been prepared in accordance with the UN Reporting Guidelines. In preparing this report, the UK Government noted the views expressed by the National Human Rights Institutions and various civil society organisations. It is informed by various government departments, the Devolved Administrations, Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories. The UK Government is committed to protecting and respecting human rights and has strong human rights protections within a comprehensive and well-established constitutional and legal system, and a longstanding tradition of ensuring rights and liberties are protected domestically, and of fulfilling our international human rights obligations. The UK Government strongly supports the work of the United Nations treaty bodies and regards them as central to the broader human rights system.

Justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights

2. The UK has implemented a combination of policies and legislation to give effect to the UN human rights treaties it has ratified. The same approach was followed by the British Overseas Territories and by the Crown Dependencies to which those treaties have been extended. We note the CESCR's recommendation on the need to give effect to our obligations and to provide effective legal remedy. The UK is confident that it is fully compliant with its UN treaty obligations including ensuring that there are effective remedies for any breaches.

Devolved Administrations

3. In providing the response the UK Government has engaged with the devolved administrations who have provided content as appropriate. The UK Government communicates with the Crown Dependencies on the implementation of the Covenant but remains conscious of their constitutional rights of self-government and judicial independence to ensure the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all. With regards to Overseas Territories (OT), each has its own legislative body, and democratically elected governments. In the event measures are required to ensure the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by persons in an OT, the relevant OT Government would legislate in the first instance and would be supported by the UK Government. As small communities, the OTs have limited capacity to provide detailed information.

Bill of Rights

4. The UK Government recently consulted on proposals to reform and replace the Human Rights Act (HRA) with a modern Bill of Rights. With this work, the UK Government seeks to fulfil its 2019 manifesto commitment to 'update the Human Rights Act...to ensure there is a proper balance between the rights of individuals, our vital national security and effective government.' The consultation makes clear that the UK will remain party to the European Convention on Human Rights. The problems have arisen from the way in which the Convention rights have been applied in practice, both at the Strasbourg level and under the Human Rights Act's procedural framework.

5. The UK Government is considering responses to the proposals that will strengthen the right to freedom of expression and recognise the right to jury trial in our domestic human rights legislation. The reforms will ensure a proper balance is struck between individuals' rights, personal responsibility, and the wider public interest. They will strengthen the role of the UK Supreme Court, preserve Parliament's democratic prerogatives and support the integrity of the UK while respecting the devolution settlements.

6. In bringing forward these consultation proposals the UK Government built on the work of the Independent Human Rights Act Review panel (IHRAR). In December 2020, IHRAR was established to examine the framework of the HRA 1998, how it is operating in practice and whether any change is required. The Review panel launched a public call for evidence on 13 January 2021, in accordance with its Terms of Reference which closed on the 3 March 2021. Submissions have been published on the Review's website. Following the call for evidence, the panel engaged with interested parties by carrying out 7 public roadshow events and over 10 roundtables. The UK Government published the Panel's report, alongside its own consultation document, on 14 December 2021.

7. Scotland's new Human Rights Bill will incorporate four United Nations Human Rights treaties into Scots Law (subject to devolved competence):

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD);
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

8. Additionally, it will incorporate legislation that enhances human rights for women, disabled people and minority ethnic communities.

9. The UK Government is firmly committed to upholding the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the institutions it established, which includes provision for a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland. Consensus, including between the Northern Ireland parties is needed before any agreement can be reached on what a Bill of Rights should include. This approach was always envisaged in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The New Decade, New Approach Agreement (NDNA), agreed in January 2020 to see devolved government restored in Northern Ireland, contained the following commitment:

“An Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee will be established to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights that is faithful to the stated intention of the 1998 Agreement in that it contains rights supplementary to those contained in the European Convention on Human Rights (which are currently applicable) and “that reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland”; as well as reflecting the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem”.

10. This Committee has been established and work is underway. The NDNA commits the parties to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights through the work of an Assembly Adhoc Committee, and it is only right to let that work proceed.

Business and economic, social and cultural rights

Regulatory Framework

11. The UK was the first UN Member State to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This was updated in 2016 to reflect actions taken by the UK Government in helping businesses to fulfil their responsibility to respect human rights. The NAP sets out several actions taken by the UK Government to promote access to a remedy including supporting access to remedy for human rights abuses by business enterprises through its employment tribunals for cases of labour rights, avenues for civil law claims, and specific criminal law provisions.

Legal Liabilities of Companies

12. The Modern Slavery Act (2015) requires certain businesses to produce a statement demonstrating steps they have taken to ensure there is no modern slavery in their business or supply chains. All Government departments published their first individual annual Modern Slavery Statements in 2021.

13. Following a public consultation on measures to strengthen the legislation, the UK Government has also extended reporting to public bodies with a budget of £36 million or more to create private and public sector parity and enhanced transparency by developing an online registry for modern slavery statements.

14. Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006 makes it clear that, in fulfilling their duty to promote the success of the company, directors must consider the interests of their employees and the impact on the community of the company's operations. Amendments to the UK Companies Act in 2013 required listed companies to report on material human rights impacts relevant to the business, in their annual report. Further amendments to the Act in 2016 strengthened the requirement to provide a fuller framework for strategic reporting, including on due diligence arrangements.

15. The UK is also a signatory to the 1976 OECD Declaration on International Investment and MNEs, which adopted the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The Guidelines are a set of voluntary principles and standards for businesses to conform to responsible business practices, including human rights, labour standards and environment. The UK operates a National Contact Point which represents the UK at the OECD Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct, promotes the Guidelines and runs a non-judicial grievance mechanism against companies for alleged non-observance of the Guidelines which can include the examination of instances where abuses of human rights may have occurred.

Risk Assessments for Arms exports

16. The UK Government takes its strategic export control responsibilities very seriously. We examine every application on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria and will not grant an export licence where it would be inconsistent with the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (SELC), which includes respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. The SELC provide a thorough risk assessment framework and requires consideration of the possible impact of providing equipment.

17. Risks around human rights abuses are a key part of our assessment. We do not license equipment and technology where we assess there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or to facilitate internal repression, nor to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law. An export licence would not be granted if it were incompatible with the SELC. Criterion 1 concerns respect for the UK's international obligations and commitments, in particular sanctions and conventions such as the Ottawa Convention or Arms Trade Treaty. Criterion 2 concerns respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country of final destination as well as respect by that country for international humanitarian law. A commercial relationship does not prevent us from speaking frankly to governments about issues of concern, including human rights.

International development cooperation

18. While we see the state as the guarantor of quality basic education for all, it doesn't need to be the only financier, or provider, of education services. In many countries where the UK provides aid, non-state providers, including low-cost private schools, play an important – and growing – role in delivering education, particularly in the poorest countries. The UK takes a pragmatic approach to supporting education where our priority is to ensure children get the education they deserve. Where state provision is weak or non-existent, we will work with non-state providers – including paid-for schools – to provide an education to children who would otherwise get none. This includes public-private partnerships, leverage private sector financing for education, or working with governments to strengthen regulation and oversight of non-state provision. All of these elements of support are subject to rigorous social assessments to ensure that they do not lead to adverse social consequences.

19. We take monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects very seriously and all elements of support provided to receiving countries are subject to rigorous social (including human rights) assessments to ensure that they do not lead to adverse social consequences. We further work to ensure that individuals are able raise concerns about violations of their

rights, including economic, social and cultural rights within their respective countries. The UK's approach to addressing violations will vary depending on the receiving country and particular project.

20. The Bailiwick of Jersey's international development programme is coordinated by Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA). JOA's international development portfolio is spread between six target countries (Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Nepal). Through its humanitarian funding stream, JOA provides support to agencies providing lifesaving interventions for civilians affected by conflict as well as those caught in natural hazards. chosen, not only by where needs are greatest, but also where lower levels of corruption mean that aid can have more of an impact.

Tax Policies

Human rights impact assessment on fiscal policies

21. The UK Government regularly carries out and publishes analysis of its fiscal policies, and the impact of these on households across all income thresholds. For example, the 'Impact on Households' document outlines the distributional impact of tax, welfare and public service spending decisions announced since Spending Round 2019. It also presents analysis of the wider trends in living standards, focusing on employment, earnings, and household incomes – including estimated impacts of COVID-19 support schemes on working households' incomes, as of the end of November 2020. An example of specific policies implemented can be seen from the Budget in March 2021 which announced that the inheritance tax-free thresholds will remain at 2020-21 levels until April 2026 rather than increase with inflation. The nil-rate band will continue at £325,000 and the residence nil-rate band will continue at £175,000 during this period.

22. Between 2010 and 2020, the UK Government introduced over 150 new measures and invested over £2 billion to tackle tax avoidance and evasion and have secured and protected over £288 billion for public services since 2010 including an additional £3 billion from those trying to hide money abroad. The UK's tax gap is among the lowest worldwide (5.3% in 2019-20). In 2020-21 alone, the UK secured and protected an additional £3 billion in tax from the wealthiest individuals and £13.2 billion from our largest and most complex businesses.

23. Scotland's Capital Spending Review (CSR), published February 2021, provides a framework for shaping future capital commitments. The CSR delivers on the National Infrastructure Mission, to raise Scottish infrastructure investment to internationally competitive levels, while also supporting employment and economic recovery through our large-scale infrastructure plans. Since 2017-18, the Scottish Parliament has had the power to set the rates and bands that apply to non-savings non-dividend Income Tax for Scottish taxpayers. In 2018-19, the Scottish Government introduced substantial reforms to Scottish Income Tax, with 1p added to the Higher and Top Rates, and the addition of two new bands to split the previous Basic Rate band. The Scottish Government annually publishes distributional analysis of its Income Tax policy proposals which explores impacts across the income distribution, as well as across protected characteristics of gender, age and disability.

Measures to tackle tax abuse

24. The UK Government has also introduced policies to prevent profits attributable to UK activities from being shifted overseas, such as UK Hybrid rules (2017) and the Corporate Interest Restriction Rules (2017). The UK has been at the forefront of the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project since 2013 and has worked with over 130 jurisdictions to agree a two-pillar solution to the challenges around the digitalisation of the economy representing a major reform of the international tax framework, ensuring multinational businesses pay their fair share. The UK was also fundamental in driving the creation of the OECD's Common Reporting Standard (CRS) in 2013, revolutionising tax transparency by requiring financial institutions to report information on taxpayers' offshore

income and financial assets, which jurisdictions across the world then automatically exchange to help identify non-compliance.

25. The Scottish General Anti-Avoidance Rule allows Revenue Scotland to take counteraction against arrangements which it considers to be artificial. During the pandemic, the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No. 2) Act, prohibited businesses with certain connections to tax havens from receiving coronavirus-related grants through the financial support schemes offered.

26. All Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories with a financial centre work in cooperation with the UK in their commitment to upholding global standards in order to address tax abuse. The Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey have committed to the EU's Code of Conduct Group on Business Taxation and both have been confirmed as a cooperative jurisdiction, effectively whitelisting it for the purposes of tax cooperation. This was reaffirmed twice in 2020, as well as in 2021.

Deficit Reduction Measures

27. The UK Government will spend £254bn through the welfare system in 2022/23 (in the United Kingdom) including £108bn on people of working age (Great Britain) and over £134bn on pensioners (Great Britain). Of the total amount, around £64bn is spent on supporting disabled people and people with health conditions in Great Britain.

28. In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires Welsh Ministers to set national indicators to assess progress towards achieving the seven wellbeing goals. One of those goals is for a more equal Wales. Progress towards this goal is reported within the Wellbeing of Wales report, referring to disadvantaged groups, which is carried out each year, and informs future policies in pursuit of these goals.¹

29. Following the introduction of the Scottish Welfare Fund scheme, Scotland's most vulnerable households have received awards totalling £287.3 million in support. Around half were awarded to applicants living in Scotland's most deprived areas. A third of households receiving an award were families with children, while just over half were single person households with no children.² In response to the pandemic, the budget for the Welfare fund was increased to a total of £57.5 million for the financial year of 2020-21.

30. In response to the pandemic, the UK Government spent up to £400bn protecting jobs and incomes, including an additional over £7.4bn in 2020/21 to strengthen welfare support for people of working age.

31. Our focus is on helping people to move into and progress in work based on clear evidence that this is the best way to tackle all forms of poverty, whether they be against statistical measures or a concept of material deprivation. The UK has a record number of vacancies and the UK Government's expanded, multi-billion-pound Plan for Jobs is helping people to find work and boost their wages.

32. The UK Government has regularly published distributional analysis providing a detailed record of the impact of policies on households. Autumn Budget 2021 analysis shows that households in the lowest income decile will receive more than £4 in public spending for every £1 they pay in tax on average. Furthermore, under the Equality Act 2010, public bodies are required to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in all their functions, including when making policies and delivering services. In line with the Equality Act 2010, the UK Government carries out equality impact assessments prior to implementing policies in order to ascertain how decisions may affect equality, the results of which inform the design of the policies.

33. The UK Government has introduced numerous policies to provide support to disadvantaged groups. Since 2011, more than £20bn has been allocated to Pupil Premium funding to assist schools in tackling the challenges faced by disadvantaged students. Between

¹ 42329 WCFG Essentials Guide (gov.wales).

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-annual-update-2020-2021/>.

2011 and 2019, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers narrowed by 13% at age 11 and 9% at age 16, as measured by the disadvantaged gap index.

34. A range of financial support schemes have been introduced to support disadvantaged children. Our Holiday Activities and Food programme provides free healthy meals and enriching activities to children in the longer school holidays. Through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme and the Covid Local Support Grant, the UK Government provided £429.1m in funding to Local Authorities in England to support the most vulnerable households with the costs of essentials between December 2020 and September 2021, with at least 80% being spent on households with children. The UK Government introduced the 16-19 Bursary Fund and 'disadvantage' funding to further education institutions to provide the same level of support to post-16 students under the care of local authorities as pre-16 students. Lastly, the Period Product scheme has provided students at primary, secondary and further education institutions with free access to period products. The UK has also implemented a range of schemes to tackle the impact of Covid on children, particularly those in low-income households. For example, in June 2020, we announced a £1bn Covid catch-up package, which provides universal funding for schools to help pupils make up for lost teaching time during the 20/21 academic year. Further recovery plans have also been put in place for the next two academic years.

Legal aid

35. The 2019 Post-Implementation Review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment Offenders Act (LASPO) considered the legal aid scheme and access to justice. As part of the Legal Support Action Plan, we announced a review of the means test for legal aid, to assess the effectiveness with which the means test protects access to justice, particularly for those who are vulnerable. In the Legal Support Action Plan, we also committed to piloting early legal advice in social welfare law with the aim of tackling clustered problems earlier in an applicant's journey.

36. Employment Tribunal fees were removed in 2017. The UK Government recognises that the charging of fees needs to strike the right balance between protecting access to justice and providing adequate funding to ensure an efficient and effective courts and tribunals service. Accordingly, courts and tribunals fees remain under review. Discrimination cases in relation to a breach of the Equality Act 2010 are in scope of legal aid. We are expanding legal aid provision through the Nationality and Borders Bill, aiming to provide advice to individuals who are prioritised for removal from the UK, and to help identify victims of modern slavery.

37. The Welsh Government is committed to establishing an Equalities Legal Service in Wales. It also provides grants to organisations who provide advice services.

38. The 2019 Access to Justice (Jersey) Law gives a statutory basis to Jersey's legal aid scheme, which changes the way in which legal aid is funded and introduces a number of changes for assessing who should be eligible for legal aid, including:

- Assessing financial eligibility based on an individual's capital and income levels, rather than based on their household capital and income levels as has previously been the case;
- Removing the requirement for legal aid clients to pay contributions towards Public / Criminal Law legal aid;
- Targeting funding to accredited panels of specialist legal representatives to provide advice on criminal, mental health, and public children law matters on a fixed fee basis and the facilitation of a choice of representation for the client in respect of criminal matters.

39. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that legal assistance is available to all those who require it and, throughout 2021, has delivered a support package at a cost of approximately £20 million to legal aid providers and £50 million to justice agencies to help ensure access to justice is maintained. People applying for legal aid funding through the

Scottish legal aid system are not subject to a residency test so immigration status is not a barrier that would prevent individuals from accessing justice. Similarly, applicants do not necessarily require a bank account to be eligible. The Scottish Government is also committed to working with the legal profession to bring forward reforms in a Legal Aid Reform Bill in this Scottish parliament. Reform will focus on a number of areas including providing more planned and targeted legal service interventions for those that require it, whether that be clients with particular legal issues (such as asylum and immigration) or clients based in specific geographical locations.

Equality Act

40. For England, the UK Government's view is that the socio-economic duty in Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010 would be best implemented through specific policies and practical actions that will deliver real change in tackling poverty and promoting social mobility. It is more effective to design specific programmes under the UK Government's levelling-up agenda to address social mobility problems identified in particular areas, as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach. There are no plans to implement the socio-economic duty for English and cross-border bodies. Such a general "due regard" duty has the potential to become a tick-box exercise, complied with to minimise the risk of legal challenge rather than to promote real change in social mobility. The UK Government's view is that the Equality Act 2010 provides robust protection across a range of protected characteristics and an employee or service user may bring a claim on more than one ground. The courts already have the discretion to allow people to bring multiple claims on different grounds where justifiable to do so. Therefore, introducing the combined discrimination: dual characteristics (Section 14) provision in Great Britain is considered unnecessary.

41. The provisions on a socio-economic duty mentioned above are already in force in Scotland and Wales. In January 2020 the Welsh Government commissioned research to understand and determine if, and to what extent, changes to existing equality and human rights legislation and statutory guidance, and/or the introduction of new legislation and statutory guidance, is required to strengthen and advance equality and human rights in Wales. The research makes 40 recommendations which are being shared and discussed at official level to consider how they might be integrated into ongoing and future planned work in the context of the Programme for Government commitments to incorporate some UN Conventions.

42. The Northern Ireland Executive has completed a review of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 on the basis of allowing the same levels of legislative protection for members of the Ethnic Communities as they would have in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). New primary legislation will be required to implement the review: it is anticipated this will improve protection in the workplace which should help migrant workers.

43. The Equality Act 2017 was passed and brought into operation in the Isle of Man, enshrining the legal right to equality of opportunity and protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation and covers the same protected characteristics as the UK Act. If a person considers that they have been subject to unlawful discrimination, they can take a case to the Employment and Equality Tribunal.

44. Following parliamentary debates, Guernsey is drafting legislation, which it hopes to introduce during 2022, to protect people from discrimination in the fields of employment, the provision of goods and services, education, accommodation, and membership of clubs and associations on the grounds of disability, race, religious belief, sexual orientation and carer status. A second phase of the legislation will add protection on the grounds of age and sex.

Asylum seekers

45. In compliance with our statutory obligations, asylum seekers are provided with a comprehensive support package that usually consists of free accommodation and a weekly cash allowance to meet essential living needs, such as food, clothes etc. The level of the cash allowance is reviewed regularly. For example, as a result of the 2020 review the weekly

monetary allowance was increased from £37.75 to £39.63, an increase of around 5% above levels of inflation at the time. Our policy allows asylum seekers to work if their claim has been outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own. Those permitted to work are restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List (SOL), which is based on expert advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee. We are currently reforming our asylum system through a programme called the New Plan for Immigration. The plan has three key objectives. The first is to increase the fairness and efficacy of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum. The second is to deter illegal entry into the UK, breaking the business model of people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger. And the third is to remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

Equality between men and women

46. The UK gender pay gap has fallen by approximately a quarter in the last decade. In 2017, we introduced regulations requiring large employers to publish the differences in average salaries and bonuses for men and women, which have been essential in motivating employers to recognise and eliminate gaps in their own organisations, and also look at the drivers behind these. More broadly, the introduction of new regulations in this area has captured the attention of the media and individuals, sparking real discussions about equal pay and the gender pay gap in homes and workplaces and focussing attention on improving equality in the workplace. Additionally, to support talented, diverse leadership in the UK's top companies we established the Hampton-Alexander Review; an independent, voluntary, business-led review supported by the UK Government, using data transparency to drive change. In February 2021, the fifth and final report from the review was published. It showed that the FTSE 100, 250 and 350 all reached the target of women making up 33% of boards, with the FTSE 100 achieving their target ahead of schedule; and the number of women on FTSE boards was up by 50% in just five years.

47. In Wales, the Diversity in Democracy programme supports the provision of mentoring and legislative change to ensure local elected representatives have access to family absence provision and executive job sharing. As part of the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Welsh Government are consulting on national milestones around the elimination of the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity by 2050, and the employment gap in Wales, with a focus on raising labour market participation of under-represented groups. In March 2020 the Welsh Government published an action plan to advance gender equality in Wales. The plan includes actions across a range of policy areas such as employment, transport, childcare, education and leadership which will collectively contribute to achieving our vision for a gender equal Wales.

48. The Scottish Government introduced the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 which sets a "gender representation objective" for the boards of listed Scottish public authorities that 50% of the board's non-executive members are women, and it requires appointing persons and public authorities to take certain steps towards achieving the objective. In March 2019, the Scottish Government published 'A fairer Scotland for women: gender pay gap action plan', setting out actions to address the gender pay gap, by looking at the drivers and influences on the gender pay gap at each stage of a woman's life. On 18 December 2020 we published Scotland's first Gender Equality Index. This sets a baseline against which Scotland will be able to measure its progress towards equality between men and women through time. Our flagship 'Fair Work First' approach includes "action to tackle the gender pay gap and create more diverse and inclusive workplaces" and the promotion of flexible working as key criteria. The Scottish Government funds 'Equate Scotland' to support the recruitment, retention, return and success of women into STEM jobs where they are significantly under-represented. As part of their work, the Scottish Government funds Equate Scotland to deliver the CareerWISE programme, which offers female undergraduates paid work placements with STEM employers. The Scottish Government funds 'Close the Gap' to change employment practices and workplace cultures to support gender equality and tackle the pay gap. The Supporting Equality and Human Rights Fund, managed by Inspiring Scotland, is worth up to £7m per annum from October

2021 to September 2024 to promote equality and tackle discrimination and prejudice. Scotland has committed to building a system of wrap-around school age childcare by the end of this Scottish Parliament, offering care before and after school and in the holidays, and supporting parents – particularly on low incomes – to have secure and stable employment.

49. The Northern Ireland Executive has implemented the following actions to improve gender equality:

- The Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland;³
- A Gender Equality Strategy (GES) is being developed;
- A Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls is being developed;⁴
- New Beginnings Programme seeks to increase the participation of women in economic life and entrepreneurship.

50. In 2017, Guernsey introduced a new package of parental benefits, enabling either parent to claim new-born care allowance, with the aim of reducing barriers to women entering or re-entering the work force, which have an impact on the employment gap between men and women.

51. In Jersey, since 2019 the State’s Employment Board (SEB) has published gender pay gap figures annually. The SEB is the employer of all public employees in Jersey and has developed a Diversity and Inclusion policy, to improve equality and opportunity within the State of Jersey by creating opportunities for all and rewarding all employees fairly, regardless of any personal characteristic or circumstance. The Jersey Government has established the Inspiring Women into Leadership and Learning (I WILL) initiative, which is an important tool in increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions within the Government of Jersey, and to develop opportunities for women to connect and network across the organisation.

Unemployment

52. The UK Government’s Plan for Jobs continues to deliver support to help people to stay in or get back into work. Specific measures include Kickstart (for 16–24-year-olds at risk of long-term unemployment) and our Youth Offer, which provides intensive work coach support to 18–24-year olds who are claiming Universal Credit. In October 2021, we announced a £500 million expansion to our Plan for Jobs. For young people, this includes extending Kickstart to March 2022 and the Youth Offer until 2025.

53. The UK Government is committed to improving the lives of disabled people. There are a range of government initiatives in place to support disabled people and people with health conditions to live independent lives and start, stay and succeed in employment where possible.⁵ These include the Work and Health programme, Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme, Access to Work, Disability Confident, and support provided in partnership with the healthcare system.

54. Our strategy for increasing ethnic minority employment is based on meeting the local needs and circumstances of ethnic minorities. We look at a combination of the population, the employment rate gap, and the gap between the overall and ethnic minority employment rates to identify areas with high employment gaps. Action to target the gaps includes creating ethnic minority outreach roles, providing support for young people from our most disadvantaged ethnic minority communities and placing work coaches in local areas with large ethnic minority communities. We also work with employers to explore what more can be done to increase ethnic minority employment such as sharing best practice on creating an

³ Available at: Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland (publicappointmentsni.org).

⁴ Available at: Call for Views in relation to the development of the Strategy to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls | The Executive Office (executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk).

⁵ Browse: Benefits and financial support if you’re disabled or have a health condition – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

inclusive workforce and running mentoring circles where employer mentors lead meetings to strengthen jobseekers' skills and help them to gain an understanding of different work sectors.

55. As already mentioned, the Welsh Government is consulting on a national milestone to "Eradicate the gap between the employment rate in Wales and the UK by 2050" with a focus on raising labour market participation of under-represented groups. A Taskforce is due to be established to address the inequalities highlighted by the 'Locked Out: Liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond COVID-19' report and to oversee the implementation of actions in conjunction with our partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Welsh Government has already put in place measures to address inequalities identified in the report. They have undertaken to strengthen the human rights framework by incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law. This represents a significant commitment to supporting and improving the lives of disabled people and will build on the provisions of the Socio-economic Duty in the Equality Act 2010.

56. The Northern Ireland Executive has taken a number of steps to increase the employment rate, including the following:

- The Labour Market Partnership Model, to build multi-agency partnerships;
- The JobStart Scheme, which provides funding for employers to create job opportunities for young people;
- The Adviser Discretion Fund which is a grant to remove barriers to employment;
- Work Experience Programme aims to offer high quality work experience placement opportunities;
- Work Ready Employability Services provides short training modules;
- The Executive is to become formally accredited as a Living Wage employer.

57. The Scottish Government published the Minority Ethnic Recruitment toolkit in September 2020, to support employers to improve workforce diversity and re-examine recruitment processes. The 2016 'A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People – Delivery Plan' is focused on halving the disability employment gap. Although the impacts of Covid resulted in an increase in the gap in 2020, there has been an overall decrease since 2016, from 37.4 percentage points to 32.6 percentage points in 2019. The 2018 'A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People – Employment Action Plan' was developed to focus on three key themes; supporting employers to recruit and retain disabled people, supporting disabled people to enter employment and young people and transitions, and included the commitment to at least halve the DEG by 2038, together with initial actions to take and interim milestones to measure progress, which has included:

- Development of the Scottish Government Recruitment and Retention Plan for Disabled People (published August 2019);
- The establishment of the Public Social Partnership, which will design, develop and implement solutions to the barriers employers face in hiring and retaining disabled people;
- Establishment of the first Scottish Access to Work Stakeholder Forum in October 2021;
- Support and funding made available to support specifically unemployed disabled parents in poverty.

58. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting inclusion in the workplace for British Sign Language (BSL) users, making opportunities for training and work available to all. Measures relating to BSL have been included in the National Plan 2017-2023, such as the inclusion of BSL in information shared by the Scottish Government and the provision of Workplace Equality Fund since 2017 to support inclusion in the workplace for BSL users. Similarly the British Sign Language Bill has now received Royal Assent by the UK Parliament across Great Britain.

59. In Jersey, the Customer and Local Services Team operate a number of schemes to support residents into work.⁶

60. Unemployment in Guernsey is very low, at 0.6% of the population. There is currently a labour shortage, particularly in the care, hospitality and retail sectors, due to a range of factors, which have reduced the number of guest workers coming to work in the Islands.

Working conditions

61. UK employment law sets out the statutory minimum rights and responsibilities for individuals and employers in the workplace. In the UK employment rights are determined by their employment status. There are three employment statuses:

- Employees are entitled to all rights (subject to qualifying periods) and have responsibilities towards their employer;
- Limb (b) workers are entitled to core employment rights but have increased flexibility in where, when and how they work;
- Self-employed individuals generally have no employment rights but have complete flexibility in their work and are in business for themselves, delivering services to a client.

62. We believe the UK's current three-tiered employment status framework strikes the right balance between the flexibility our economy needs and protections for workers.

63. Individuals on zero-hour contracts represent just 3% of the workforce. The flexibility supports workers who need to balance work around personal commitments, and most workers on zero hours contracts find this arrangement beneficial. The UK Government has taken action to improve fairness for workers on these contracts and prevent exploitation of vulnerable workers. Exclusivity clauses in zero hours contracts have been banned in England, Scotland and Wales to give workers more flexibility, and introduced rights for all workers in Great Britain to receive a day one written statement of rights and a payslip including number of hours worked to improve clarity and transparency for workers on zero hours contracts. From 6 April 2020, employment businesses should provide a Key Information Document (KID) to agency workers when they register and before the employment business provides any work-finding services. This document should provide a range of pay-related information and seeks to ensure that individuals have a better understanding of their employer and the deductions that will be made from their pay, enabling them to make better-informed choices about how they wish to be engaged.

64. We take extra measures to protect certain vulnerable workers. Agency workers are protected by the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate in Great Britain and the Employment Agency Inspectorate in Northern Ireland, and workers in agriculture and fresh produce supply chains are protected by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA). Withholding wages from workers is a violation of the regulations enforced by both of these bodies. The rules in relation to working time, minimum wage and overtime are the same for all workers regardless their contracts, and there are plans to increase the National Living Wage in the UK in April 2022 (see section on Minimum Wage below).

65. We are committed to creating a new right in Great Britain whereby workers will be able to request a more predictable working pattern from their employer after 26 weeks of service. Those who are content to work varied hours each week will be able to continue. The UK Government continues to explore options to clarify employment status so that employers and individuals better understand their rights and responsibilities. Following feedback from the Trades Union Congress, the UK Government has committed to introducing legislation to expand state enforcement for agency workers to cover umbrella companies. This will enable inspectors to investigate complaints involving an umbrella company and take enforcement action where required.

⁶ Employment Incentive (gov.je) and New Autumn Employer Incentive (gov.je).

66. As part of the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Welsh Government has committed to set national indicators to measure the percentage of people in employment on permanent contracts (or on temporary contracts, and not seeking permanent employment) who earn at least the real Living Wage, and the proportion of employees whose pay is set by collective bargaining. Procurement duties in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill will require public bodies to focus on socially responsible outcomes when they are spending public money. The Bill also includes contract management duties for large construction and outsourcing contracts that will make sure that fair work and wellbeing outcomes are pursued through supply chains. This will build on pre-existing progress, for example with over 300 organisations signed up to Codes of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains, and the many years of training and job opportunities through the Community Benefits programme provided to people who have experienced long-term unemployment.

67. The Scottish Government opposes the inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts and does not directly employ people through zero-hours contracts. Through the Fair Work First policy, the Scottish Government will use its financial powers to drive fair work practices, including no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts; this forms part of the Fair Work First criteria– the key mechanism for driving fair work practices across the labour market. The Scottish Government also supports the Poverty Alliance to promote payment of the real Living Wage through the Scottish Living Wage Employer Accreditation and recognises that security of contract is also important. The Living Hours Accreditation Scheme for Scotland recognises that the number and frequency work hours are critical to tackling in-work poverty and businesses looking for certification must meet the following standards: Payment of the real Living Wage, providing a contract reflecting accurate hours worked and a guaranteed minimum of 16 hours a week (unless the worker requests otherwise) and ensuring at least 4 weeks' notice of shifts and guaranteed payment if shifts are cancelled within this period.

68. In Jersey, the provision of safe and healthy working conditions is set out under the Health and Safety at Work (Jersey) Law, 1989, and places general duties on employers, employees and the self-employed. The Health and Safety at Work (Amendment No. 4) (Jersey) Law 2010 clarified the need for employers to undertake risk assessments for their employees' health and safety. The website of the Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate provides up-to-date information, including its annual report which includes statistical information on work related accidents and ill health as a result of claims made by individuals for Social Security benefit.

Working conditions of migrant workers

69. The rights of migrant workers continue to be protected in domestic legislations such as the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 gives law enforcement agencies the tools to tackle modern slavery, including maximum life sentences for perpetrators of slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking, whilst also providing enhanced protection for victims of these crimes.

70. Legal aid is available for immigration matters for individuals who have received a positive 'reasonable grounds' or 'conclusive grounds' determination from the National Referral Mechanism. Legal aid is available for applications for leave to enter or to remain in the UK, claims under employment law as well as claims for damages. Furthermore, in accordance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, we operate a dedicated immigration route for migrant domestic workers found to be victims of slavery or trafficking. This is in addition to existing provisions for Discretionary Leave which are available to all victims of human trafficking or modern slavery.

71. Migrants who are legally working in the UK enjoy the full protection of UK employment law and health and safety legislation. Regulatory bodies such as EAS Inspectorate and the GLAA, are designed to protect vulnerable workers, including those from overseas. The GLAA will investigate all allegations of abuse made to it and can revoke licenses where worker rights are not being upheld. Additionally, any worker who thinks that they might be being underpaid or their employer has unsafe working practices can contact

ACAS, for free, confidential advice. The Immigration Rules governing visa categories for migrant domestic workers are designed to identify exploitative practices during the application process. The majority of economic and work routes require a Certificate of Sponsorship. Holding a sponsor license allows employers to recruit workers from abroad but also places a responsibility on them to ensure the immigration system is not abused. To achieve this, all licensed sponsors must fulfil certain duties, which include compliance with UK employment law. The GLAA operates a licensing scheme in certain sectors to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation. This includes a process of inspections of businesses. Through the Immigration Act 2016, we reformed the enforcement landscape to tackle labour exploitation and introduced measures to strengthen this, including expanding the role and remit of the GLAA, giving it specially trained officers police powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to enable them to prevent, detect and investigate serious labour exploitation across the entire economy.

72. The UK Government has also committed to establishing a single enforcement body for employment rights to better protect vulnerable workers, including migrant workers, and create a level playing field for the majority of employers complying with the law. This “one-stop shop” approach will help improve enforcement through better co-ordination and pooling of intelligence. The new watchdog will also enhance workers’ rights by providing a single, recognisable port of call for workers so they know their rights and can report bad behaviour. As well as enforcing all existing powers of the three existing enforcement agencies (EAS Inspectorate, GLAA and HMRC National Minimum Wage team) the new body will have the ability to ensure vulnerable workers get the holiday pay and statutory sick pay they are entitled to without having to go through a lengthy employment tribunal process. Primary legislation will be required to create this new body and so timing will be dependent on the legislative timetable.

National minimum wage

73. Workers, regardless of their age, are entitled to a statutory minimum wage, either the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or the National Living Wage (NLW). Since 2021 the NLW has applied to those aged 23 and over. We have plans to further reduce the age threshold for the NLW to 21 by 2024. Younger workers and apprentices are entitled to the NMW. The NLW and NMW are reviewed annually. They have increased every year since their introduction. Since 2015, the Low Pay Commission has been required to recommend rate increases for the NLW which reflect growth in median earnings. It bases its recommendations on a significant amount of economic and stakeholder evidence. By law the Commission must be comprised of nine Commissioners, equally representing employer, worker, and independent backgrounds. This allows it to make recommendations which are sufficient for a decent standard of living for workers and take business impact into account. The UK Government has accepted all the recommendations of the independent Low Pay Commission for the April 2022 NLW and NMW rates. On 1 April 2022, the NLW for workers aged 23 years and over will increase by 6.6% to £9.50. This keeps the UK Government on track to achieve its manifesto commitment for the NLW to equal two-thirds of median earnings by 2024. This is the largest ever increase to the NLW, and the highest increase in percentage terms since 2016. Wages for workers under 23 years old will also increase. For those aged 21-22 the NMW rate will increase to £9.18 an hour, an increase of nearly 10%. Workers aged under 20 will see a 4.1% increase in their NMW rates, to £6.83 for those aged 18-20 and £4.81 for those aged under 18. The minimum hourly wage for an apprentice will increase by nearly 12%, going from £4.30 to £4.81 an hour. We expect these increases to the NLW and NMW to give a pay rise to around 2.5 million workers.

74. The Welsh Government has committed to a national indicator to measure the percentage of people in employment who are on permanent contracts (or on temporary contracts, and not seeking permanent employment) and who earn at least the Real Living Wage as part of the progress in Wales towards the achievement of the seven well-being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

75. The Scottish Government is using all the levers it has at its disposal to promote fair work practices across Scotland including promoting payment of the real Living Wage. The

real Living Wage in Scotland is paid to all workers over 18 years old, is reviewed annually, and calculated according to the basic cost of living, taking account of the adequacy of household incomes for achieving an acceptable minimum living standard. Currently 85% of over 18s receive at least the real Living Wage.

76. In Jersey, the Employment Forum continues to have a statutory duty to review and make recommendations to the Minister for Social Security, on the level of the minimum wage and trainee rates. The latest minimum wage increases will take effect from 1 January 2022. A revised process for consulting on, and implementing, the level of the minimum wage will be put in place in 2022. The Forum will also be undertaking a fundamental review of the Employment Law framework, with particular emphasis on the level of employee protections to ensure that employees are treated fairly and appropriately, and a review of the operation of zero-hours contracts.

77. In Guernsey, in 2018, the States agreed a medium-term plan to set Guernsey's minimum wage rates at 60% of median earnings and to equalise the adult and youth rates by 2023. The plan was paused for 2021–2022 due to the effects of the pandemic on businesses but is due to accelerate again in 2023.

Trade union rights

78. The UK Government is confident that our current domestic law sufficiently protects the rights of workers and unions. The treatment of trade unions is compliant with international conventions, and the framework for trade unions has been developed over very many years. The provisions in the Trade Union Act do not interfere with the right to join trade unions and participate in trade union activities. In the UK, all workers have the right to join a trade union and to be represented by that union in collective bargaining with employers. Where an employer refuses to recognise a union voluntarily, that union can apply on behalf of the workers to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) in Great Britain, or the Industrial Court in Northern Ireland, for statutory trade union recognition. Where that union can demonstrate it has majority support in a workplace, the CAC will grant statutory union recognition. Where an individual working in the gig economy is classified as a worker (i.e. meets the definitions of worker in the UK's legislation), then they have full union rights.

79. The UK Government notes the committee's recommendation regarding the Trade Union Act 2016 and as with all legislation we will consider how it is functioning. We believe that the new measures introduced by this act have positively impacted this area. For example, raising the turnout threshold to 50% and ensuring an additional 40% support threshold for Important Public Services (IPS) has meant that industrial action is only ever the result of a clear and positive mandate from union members. This strikes a fairer balance with the need to ensure that services that working people and businesses rely on will not be disrupted at short notice by strikes with the support of only a small proportion of union members. The Act also protects non-striking workers against intimidation, increases transparency for the taxpayer, and modernises the relationship between individual employees and their chosen trade union. It also creates an appropriate regulatory environment for unions.

80. The UK Government takes blacklisting extremely seriously. There are regulations in place targeted specifically at trade union blacklists. The Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010 made it unlawful for an individual or organisation to compile, sell or make use of a blacklist of trade union members or those who have taken part in trade union activities. Since the introduction of those regulations, no evidence has been presented to the UK Government or the Information Commissioner that these practices are recurring. Any individual or trade union who believes they have been the victim of blacklisting practices has the right to act and can enforce their rights under the regulations through an employment tribunal or the county court. Anyone who believes they have been affected has the right to pursue justice through these means and we would encourage them to do so. The 2010 blacklisting regulations are reinforced by powers in the Data Protection Act 2018, protecting use of personal data, including information on trade union membership and sensitive personal data. The UK Government believes therefore that the current regulatory framework operates effectively.

Social Security

81. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is bound by law to complete an annual review of benefit and pension rates to determine whether they have retained their value in relation to the general level of prices or, in some cases,⁷ earnings. In April 2020, working age benefits were increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 1.7%. In April 2021 there was a further CPI increase of 0.5%. In 2022/23, benefits will increase 3.1%. Uprating of working age benefits since 2019/20 has been worth £1.5 billion.

82. In addition, the UK Government has taken further action to allow low-income working households on Universal Credit to keep more of what they earn by reducing the Universal Credit taper rate from 63% to 55%, and increasing Universal Credit work allowances by £500 p.a.

83. The benefit cap introduced fairness between those receiving working age benefits and taxpayers in employment. It encourages people to move into work, where possible. Claimants can approach their Local Authority for a Discretionary Housing Payment if they need additional support to meet rental costs. The removal of the Spare Room Subsidy policy has helped to encourage mobility within the social rented sector, strengthen work-incentives and make better use of available social housing.⁸

84. Providing support for a maximum of two children or qualifying young persons in Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit ensures fairness between claimants and those who support themselves solely through work. In 2020, of all families with dependent children, 85% had a maximum of two children in their family. For lone parent families, this was 83%. Statistics are available.⁹ The two-child limit only applies to Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit and not any other benefits.

85. There are various exemptions that protect vulnerable and low-income households. For example, those claiming Universal Credit are exempt from the benefit cap if they have monthly earnings of at least £617. Similarly, regarding the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy policy, there is an exemption for the provision of an additional bedroom for disabled people and carers, foster carers, parents who adopt, parents of service personnel, and people who have suffered a recent bereavement. Additionally, those in receipt of pension age housing benefits are exempt. For those unable to meet the shortfall in their rent, further financial support can be provided via the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme. Since 2011, we have provided over £1 billion in Discretionary Housing Payments funding. There are no plans to abolish or amend this policy. In relation to the policy of support for a maximum of two children per household, the UK Government recognises that there are some instances where this policy is not appropriate, therefore exceptions have been put in place to protect certain groups. These include any child in a household who is:

- Adopted, or living long-term with friends or family, when they would otherwise be in Local Authority care;
- A child born to a young person under-16, who is living with their parents or carers (until they make a separate claim upon turning 16);
- Third and subsequent children who are:
 - Additional children in a multiple birth;
 - Likely to have been born as a result of non-consensual conception (which for this purpose includes rape or where the claimant was in a controlling or coercive relationship with the child's other biological parent at the time of conception).

⁷ Except for the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, when earnings growth was extraordinarily volatile, declining by 1% in the first year and increasing by 8.3% in the second.

⁸ Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy - Final Report - DWP Report 913 (publishing.service.gov.uk).

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-and-child-tax-credit-claimants-statistics-related-to-the-policy-to-provide-support-for-a-maximum-of-2-children-april-2021>.

86. In 2022/23 we will spend over £64bn on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions in Great Britain. In addition, vulnerable households are able to access the £500 million support fund to help them with essentials.

87. If a benefits claimant does not meet one or more conditions of their benefit claim without good reason, their benefit could be stopped or reduced, which is known as a sanction. Claimant Commitments set out actions agreed between a claimant and their work coach to help a claimant find work. The Claimant Commitment helps focus the claimant on their work related requirements, including where appropriate, proactive, work-search that treats looking for work as a full time activity and sets the right foundation ahead of Universal Credit's smoother, clearer, and more stable incentives to work.

88. The work-related requirements detailed in the Claimant Commitment are tailored to an individual's needs, capabilities, experience, and circumstances, making them realistic and achievable. Claimants can be referred for a sanction if they do not undertake reasonable steps to look for work, which includes researching roles, job applications, preparing for and attending interviews.

89. The Welsh Government recognises the importance of people accessing all the financial support that is available to them and funds income maximisation initiatives to raise awareness of non-devolved and devolved welfare benefits. For example, throughout March 2021 Welsh Government delivered its first national 'Claim What's Yours' welfare benefit take-up, resulting in an additional £651,504 being claimed by those entitled to benefits. In October 2021, Welsh Government commenced delivery of a second national take-up campaign, which will run through to early 2022. People receiving advice from Welsh Government Single Advice Fund services during the last financial year on their welfare benefit entitlements were supported to gain additional income of over £43 million.

90. In Northern Ireland, welfare mitigation schemes will continue until 31 March 2025. £200 million was paid to more than 85,000 people by 31 March 2021 and £42.8 million was allocated for 2021/22. An independent review panel is reviewing welfare mitigations.¹⁰ A review was undertaken in advance of implementing the sanctions elements of The Welfare Reform (NI) Order 2015 and additional steps were introduced.

91. In Jersey, Income Support is available to permanent residents and has replaced many of the benefits previously paid through States Departments and the Parish Welfare system, and has been centralised, requiring a single application form and a means-test based on household income. Social security rights are guaranteed to all employees in receipt of an employment contract. Jersey also operates a separate Social Security system based on employment contributions. This provides pensions and a range of working-age benefits.

92. The Scottish Government is committed to commencing work to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland, with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality and ensuring everyone has enough money to live a decent life, through a combination of employment, tax relief and social security benefits and also through access to services. Scotland's new Human Rights Bill will incorporate the ICESCR right to social security. The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 established the first social security system in the UK based on the statutory principle that social security is a human right. This Act also requires the Scottish Government to reflect this in "Our Charter" – a document that clearly sets out what people can expect from the new Scottish social security system.

Childcare

93. In September 2017, the UK Government introduced a scheme in England whereby eligible working parents of 3-4 years olds can apply for up to 30 hours of free childcare per week during term time, which works out at 1140 hours over the year. Under Universal Credit, working parents can have up to 85% of their childcare costs reimbursed. Tax-Free Childcare was introduced in 2017 whereby for every £8 parents pay their provider via an online account,

¹⁰ Communities Minister Hargreaves commissions welfare mitigations review | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk).

the UK Government will pay £2 – up to a maximum contribution of £2,000 per year for children aged 0-11, or £4,000 for children aged 0-16 if the child is disabled. The Early Years National Funding Formula, introduced in 2017, has been designed to allocate our record investment in early years entitlement funding fairly and transparently across the country. We maximise the funding reaching the frontline by requiring local authorities to pass on to providers at least 95% of their government funding for 3- and 4-year-olds. The UK Government has spent over £3.5 billion in each of the past three years on our early education entitlements and will continue to support families with their childcare costs. At the UK Government Spending Review on 27 October 2021 we announced that we are investing additional funding for the early years' entitlements worth £160m in 2022-23, £180m in 2023-24 and £170m in 2024-25 compared to the current year. This is for local authorities in England to increase hourly rates paid to childcare providers for the UK Government's free childcare entitlement offers and reflects the costs of inflation and national living wage increases.

94. The UK Government is committed to supporting the fair participation and progression of parents in the labour market. For example, Paternity Leave arrangements enable employed fathers and partners (including same sex partners), who meet the qualifying conditions, to take up to two weeks of paid leave within the first 8 weeks following the birth of their child or placement for adoption. Additionally, the Children and Families Act 2014 created a new system of "Shared Parental Leave and Pay" to facilitate shared parenting from the earliest possible opportunity, provide flexibility for both employers and their employees and greater choice for families by removing regulatory restrictions on how parents manage their working patterns in the first year after birth. From April 2015 this allowed a mother or adopter to end maternity or adoption leave early and for eligible working parents to share the remaining leave and pay (up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay) as "Shared Parental Leave and Pay" up to the child's first birthday or within one year of an adopted child being placed for adoption. To help make Shared Parental Leave more accessible, we launched a new online tool in June 2021, which allows parents to check their eligibility and plan their leave. The tool shows how many weeks of leave and pay are available and lets parents map out how weeks will be shared with their partner, facilitating conversations with their employers. The Office of National Statistics most data in 2020 shows that since 2015, time spent on unpaid work in Britain has increased for males by 22 minutes and decreased by 20 minutes for females. The gap in time spent doing unpaid work between men and women has reduced from 1 hour 50 minutes to 1 hour 7 minutes a day.

95. The 2016 Scottish Government Position Statement set out its intentions to increase funded 'early learning and childcare (ELC) and, although its implementation was delayed by the pandemic, as of August 2021 all local councils are offering 1140 hours of funded ELC to all eligible children, regardless of their parents working status. The Scottish Government will continue to work with local authorities to ensure these benefits are felt by more families. Within the 2021 Programme for Government, Scotland has also committed to expand ELC for younger children from low-income backgrounds and offer childcare for before and after school and during the holidays at no cost to families on low incomes.

96. The Welsh Government has implemented 'Flying Start', a targeted early years programme for aged 0 to 4, providing fully funded childcare to all eligible 2–3-year-olds for 2 and a half hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks a year. The Childcare Offer, which has been available across Wales since April 2019, provides 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds for up to 48 weeks a year. During term time, the Offer builds on the existing universal commitment to early education which provides all 3- and 4-year-olds with a minimum of 10 hours per week of provision. For the remaining 9 weeks the Offer funds 30 hours of childcare per week. In Wales an Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Framework is in development to streamline education and childcare together into one single system for 0-5-year-old so that all children have a high-quality stimulating learning and care experience in any education and care setting they attend. This will focus on children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs to support wellbeing and lifelong learning.

97. In October 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive introduced changes to the Adviser Discretion Fund to include upfront childcare costs. People claiming Universal Credit and

other income-based benefits can apply for a non-repayable grant of up to £1,500 to assist with childcare costs. Throughout the pandemic, support of almost £40m has been paid for the childcare sector.

98. In Jersey, through the Nursery Education Fund, from September 2021, children can receive up to 30 hours free nursery education each week, for 38 weeks, during school term-time. The Employment (Jersey) Law 2003 was amended in June 2020 to ensure 52 weeks of leave for all parents of which 6 weeks paid at 100% of pay by the employer, with no qualifying period. Parental leave is also available to adoptive and intended surrogate parents.

99. In 2017, Guernsey launched a new scheme to provide free pre-school education for 15 hours per week, for children in the year before they start school.

Violence against women with disabilities

100. Following on from our ‘Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls’ in 2010, the UK has implemented the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy which has introduced new offences for controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking, ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’. This year, the UK Government will provide an additional £1.5 million funding for victims of gender-based violence and will further increase specialist services funding for victims of violence against women and girls. This will include an increase on top of the £2 million Specialist Fund (2021-22) recently launched by the Ministry of Justice with Comic Relief, which will build the capacity of smaller, specialist organisations supporting survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence who are from ethnic minorities, are disabled, or are LGBT. Comic Relief will be distributing up to 25 grants to these smaller, specialist organisations to support activities which aim to improve digital and remote capacity, provide continuity in support, and enhance future sustainability. Additional funding of £125,000 has also been provided to Sign Health for the financial year (2021/22) to increase the accessibility of domestic abuse information, and advice and support for deaf users, and an additional £30,902 has been allocated to provide further support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Victim Support has been provided with £125,000 this year (2021/22) to provide specialist services to victims with disabilities.

101. The UK Government will publish a Domestic Abuse Strategy, outlining further UK commitments to supporting victims and pursuing perpetrators of domestic abuse. Our landmark Domestic Abuse Act will strengthen our protection to victims and ensure perpetrators feel the full force of the law. It includes the first legal definition of domestic abuse, improved support for victims in the courts, and new offences and strengthened legislation around cruel acts of controlling or coercive behaviour, including economic abuse. We will be publishing statutory guidance to accompany the legislation, which will set out guidance and support to frontline professionals, who have responsibilities for safeguarding and supporting victims of domestic abuse. This includes setting out the impacts and barriers that victims and survivors of domestic abuse face and recognising how these vary, taking into consideration intersectionality.

102. Under Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls in Scotland, we have scaled up work in respect of women with learning disabilities, and have created a working group in the Scottish Government in recognition of the fact that disabled women and girls are at greater risk of violence than non-disabled women and girls, and women with a learning/intellectual disability are more likely to experience sexual abuse than other disabled people.

103. The Welsh Government Programme commits to strengthening and expanding the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Strategy to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home. The Welsh Government is currently developing its next five-year VAWDASV National Strategy alongside a group of key partner organisations including the police, specialist sector and survivors. A public consultation on a draft Strategy will launch later in December 2021 and we will be holding engagement sessions for people to learn more about the strategy throughout December and January. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that, in the year ending March 2020, disabled people were more likely to have been

victims of domestic abuse in the last year; this is true for both men (7.5% compared with 3.2%) and women (14.7% compared with 6.0%). Research shows that disabled victims of domestic abuse also suffer more severe and frequent abuse over longer periods of time than non-disabled victims. The VAWDASV strategy will work to align to Welsh Government's Strategic Equality Plan, the draft Race Equality Action Plan, the draft LGBTQ+ and the Disability Rights action Plan as it is developed. This will ensure our response understands and reflects issues of equality, tailoring our response to ensure that inputs are specific, and outcomes equalised.

104. The implementation plan for The Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland is underway,¹¹ which aims to transform way in which the justice system deals with cases of this nature, and cultural and societal attitudes towards sexual crime.

105. A new overarching Sexual Offences (Jersey) Law introduced in Jersey in 2018 provides greater protection sexual offence victims of both genders. The law also provides a statutory definition of consent, clarifies a number of sexual and introduces a domestic abuse register and provides for the issue of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and the making of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders. The Safeguarding Partnership Board's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019-2022 has delivered a new pathway for victims of Domestic Abuse to access help.

106. Guernsey has an extant parliamentary resolution to look at whether a Bailiwick Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy is required and proportional as, fortunately, gender-based crimes are rare occurrences in Guernsey.

Tackling Poverty

107. The UK Government is committed to a sustainable, long-term approach to tackling poverty. In 2020/21 there were 1.2 million fewer people in absolute poverty before housing costs than in 2009/10, including 200,000 fewer children, 500,000 fewer working age adults and 400,000 fewer pensioners.

108. As the UK continues its economic recovery, the UK Government is focused on helping people re-enter employment and progress in their careers by moving out of low-paying employment. This approach is based on clear evidence that employment, particularly where it is full-time, substantially reduces the risks of poverty. In 2019/20, where both parents worked full-time, there was only a 3% chance of children living in poverty (absolute, before housing costs), compared with 42% where one or more parents in a couple was in part-time work. Only 10% of children in lone parent families, where the parent worked full-time, were in very low income before housing costs in 2019/20. This is compared to 22% of children with lone parents with part-time work and 38% of children where their lone parent was not working. Our multi-billion-pound Plan for Jobs, which was expanded by £500 million in October 2021, will help people across the UK to find work and to boost their wages and prospects. The Way to Work campaign, launched in January 2022, brings employers into Jobcentres and matches them up with claimants in a concerted drive across the UK to help half a million people currently out of work into jobs by June 2022.

109. The UK Government has taken further action to allow low-income working households on Universal Credit to keep more of their earnings by reducing the Universal Credit taper rate from 63% to 55%, and increasing Universal Credit work allowances by £500 p.a. Through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme and the Covid Local Support Grant the UK Government provided £421m in funding to Local Authorities in England to support the most vulnerable households with the costs of essentials between December 2020 and September 2021. In addition, the UK Government provided £32m to the food aid sector to provide meals for vulnerable people in England.

¹¹ The Gillen Review Implementation Plan | Department of Justice (justice-ni.gov.uk).

110. The UK Government tracks and monitors many different aspects of poverty, including our four statutory measures of relative income, absolute income, combined low income and material deprivation and persistent poverty.

111. We removed the child poverty targets set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 as setting targets can drive unfocused action that fixates on moving the incomes for those just above a somewhat arbitrary ‘poverty line’ whilst doing nothing to help those most in need or to improve long-term outcomes for children. The UK Government introduced two new statutory indicators to track progress on parental worklessness and children’s educational attainment – the two areas which can make the biggest difference to children’s long-term outcomes.

112. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, demonstrates the Scottish Government’s ambition to eradicate child poverty in Scotland, requiring Scottish Ministers to publish Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans and annual progress reports, and for local authorities and health boards to jointly prepare and publish annual progress reports. The first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, covering the period 2018-22, included a focus on three drivers of poverty reduction, the need to mitigate the impacts of poverty on children and to focus efforts on six priority family types at greatest risk of poverty. The Act also commits Scottish Ministers to publishing annual progress reports towards meeting the child poverty targets, and in implementing the Delivery Plan. The most recent annual report highlights that across 2020-21, the Scottish Government invested around £2.5 billion to support low-income households. The Scottish Government also introduced a wide range of additional support to protect people and communities including:

- Expanding universal provision of free school meals during school term-time to children in primaries 4 and 5, and funding provision in lieu of free school meals during school holidays for families in receipt of eligible qualifying benefits;
- Delivering 1,140 hours of free Early Learning and Childcare;
- Establishing a cross-party steering group to help towards establishing a Minimum Income Guarantee, helping everyone live healthy, financially secure and fulfilling lives.

113. The Welsh Government’s Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 provides the legislative framework for tackling child poverty in Wales. It places a duty on Welsh Ministers to implement a child poverty strategy and review progress every three years. While the Strategy does not include child poverty targets, a range of individual programmes aimed at improving outcomes for low-income households do include targets and milestones. The new Programme for Government includes a commitment to implement a Race Disparity Unit alongside an Equality Data Unit, to provide an evidenced informed response to tackling inequalities in Wales. We will also establish a Disability Disparity Unit. A new network of Disabled People’s Employment Champions will also help close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population.

114. In Northern Ireland, work is continuing on the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy. Furthermore, the 2016/19 Child Poverty Strategy has been extended to May 2022.

115. The newly appointed Isle of Man administration set out their high-level priorities in the Island Plan, including the implementation of a Childcare Strategy; a review of children’s services; improving access to health and social care; and a review of financial support towards meeting nursing home fees and social care costs. Following the draft Island Plan which implemented the recommendations of the Select Committee on Poverty, poverty will now be measured through the next Household Income and Expenditure Survey, which is due to be undertaken in 2023/24. The recommendations also include an annual report to Tynwald on poverty measures; the implementation of service level agreements with accredited charities to allow funding streams and processes for referrals and information sharing; and for the minimum wage to transition to the living wage within five years. The newly appointed administration set out their high-level priorities in the Island Plan, the implementation of a Childcare Strategy; a review of children’s services; improving access to health and social care; and a review of financial support towards meeting nursing home fees and social care costs.

Adequate housing

Supply of housing

116. The UK Government acknowledges the importance of ensuring a sufficient housing supply and has committed to deliver 1 million new homes by the end of this Parliament, whilst continuing towards the target of increasing building output to 300,000 homes a year in England by the mid-2020s. From April 2019 to March 2020 over 242,000 homes were delivered in England. During the pandemic, construction sites remained in operation, in line with public safety guidance, resulting in the further delivery of over 216,000 homes in England in 2020/21. Since 2010, the UK Government has created over 561,600 new affordable homes and will be making significant investments in schemes such as the £11.5bn Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), which aims to provide up to 180,000 new homes across the country. This builds upon the success of the £9bn Shared Ownership and AHP, running to 2023, which will deliver approximately 250,000 new affordable homes. The UK Government also provides capital grants to housing providers to help subsidise the new supply of affordable housing including specialist and supported housing. The AHP (2021-26) has a target of 10% delivery for new supported housing. The UK Government's Care & Support Specialised Housing Fund also subsidises new supply of specialist housing for older and disabled people with £71m provided for 2021-22. Similarly, the Disabled Facilities Grant has delivered an estimated 450,000 home adaptations since 2020, for disabled individuals.

117. Housing to 2040, Scotland's first long-term housing strategy, sets out the Scottish Government's ambition that by 2040, everyone in Scotland has access to a safe, warm, affordable, good quality and energy efficient home. The Scottish Government will invest £3.6 billion to deliver more social and affordable homes. Statistics show that between April 2016 and September 2021, a total of 45,053 affordable homes were delivered, over 30,000 of which were for social rent, including 10,272 council homes. The Welsh Government has committed to build 20,000 low-carbon social houses for rent in this Senedd term. Similarly, in Guernsey, the Housing Action Group was recently set up to address urgent housing issues, particularly the shortage of 'affordable' housing. A strategic and operational review of social housing was conducted in 2021 to scope the future of States-owned housing stock. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has introduced a range of measures to address housing challenges have been implemented. For example, in 2021/22, a budget of £162m has been secured to deliver 1900 new social homes. Furthermore, annual funding of £855,000 is provided to the Housing Rights charity to tackle homelessness. Lastly, £158 million of funding has been approved to assist 4,422 people into home ownership by 2023/24 via the NI Co-Ownership Housing Association.

Regulation of the private sector

118. Under UK law, there are a number of measures offering protection to tenants in the private sector, such as the Deregulation Act 2015, preventing landlords in England from using the Section 21 'no fault' eviction procedure for 6 months if a local authority has served an Improvement Notice or a notice of Emergency Remedial Action under the Housing Act 2004. The UK Government has also committed to abolish 'no-fault' evictions in England by repealing Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. Under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, due to be implemented in July 2022, tenants in Wales will get a minimum of 6 months' notice in relation to 'no-fault' evictions and if a landlord responds to a request for repair by issuing a possession notice, a court may refuse to make a possession order if satisfied the notice was issued to avoid carrying out the repair. In Guernsey a General Housing Law is due to come into force to set standards for and better regulate the private rental market.

119. A new rented sector strategy in Scotland will address a range of issues around affordability, accessibility and standards, with legislative aspects being taken forward in a new Housing Bill which will strengthen the rights of tenants, with greater protections from unreasonable rent increases and unfair evictions and improve the rights of victims of domestic abuse. A new Housing Standard set in law will require that all homes meet the same standards.

Housing Conditions

120. The UK Government is committed to ensuring that all housing conditions, including social housing, meet a safe and decent standard. For example, the Social Housing White Paper included a review of the Decent Homes Standard to consider whether it needs to be updated to make sure those standards are being met. We have also launched a national campaign to raise awareness of how to make complaints against social housing providers and seek redress. The Welsh Government have introduced measures such as the Optimised Retrofit Programme, Nest and Arbed schemes to facilitate the decarbonisation of existing homes. Where housing standards are not being met, local authorities are able to more effectively enforce the maintenance of housing standards, and now have more powers to issue penalties of up to £30,000 and extending rent repayment orders with banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders.

Traveller communities

121. In the January 2020 Traveller Caravan Count there were 354 transit pitches for traveller communities, provided by Local Authorities and Private Registered Providers in England, an increase of 40% from the January 2010 Traveller Caravan Count. Through the AHP, local authorities and registered providers can bid for funding for permanent Traveller sites, including transit sites.

122. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' joint action plan 'Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers' includes a key commitment to review housing and investment programmes, to ensure that the needs of these communities are included going forward. Consequentially, Housing to 2040 announced a £20 million Accommodation Fund for 2021-26, for more and better Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. This builds on the £2 million short-term funding provided in 2020/21, to make immediate improvements on public sites, representing a sustained investment. To drive a significant improvement in the quality of sites going forward, we are developing a Design Guide for Gypsy and Traveller sites, in conjunction with residents and local authorities. This will set the standard for new accommodation, in keeping with key principles of Housing 2040 such as accessibility and energy efficiency, which are important for all our homes.

123. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires all local housing authorities in Wales to undertake a detailed survey of the need for culturally appropriate permanent and transit provision and requires them to meet the identified need as far as is necessary. The Welsh Government have provided demand-led funding to local authorities at up to 100% of costs to assist in meeting these duties.

124. The NIHE has engaged in the preparation and implementation of the Irish Travellers' Accommodation Strategy 2021/26. The Department for Communities maintains a Design Guide for Travellers' sites. The NIHE and relevant ROI Departments have commenced work on a joint research project to identify demand for transit living throughout the island of Ireland.

Inequalities in housing for Catholic families in North Belfast

125. There are currently 256 social housing units under construction in the North Belfast Area; with 421 social housing units programmed to start as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (2022–24).

Homelessness

126. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018, places duties on local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent and/or relieve a person's homelessness. This is supported by the Homelessness Prevention Grant (£375m in 21/22) which was provided to local authorities to help vulnerable households with rent arrears

to reduce the risk of them being evicted and becoming homeless. During the pandemic we introduced new measures to help renters keep their homes by, for example banning bailiff evictions and extending notice periods. Since the introduction of the Act, over 400,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved through the securing of accommodation for a further 6 months. The *Homelessness Reduction Act Review* shows that services have improved for those who would previously have had limited support.

Adequate provision of shelters and hostels

127. As part of our funding for the voluntary sector, the UK Government has launched a £3.8 million Transformation fund, to provide shelters and hostels. The COVID-19: provision of night shelters guidance was published to ensure shelter providers are able to open and operate throughout the pandemic in a way which accounts for COVID-19 regulations.

128. In Jersey, there are various policies in place to ensure access to adequate housing and prevent homelessness, through its benefit system and the provision of hostel accommodation. These are regularly reviewed to consider the cost of living on the Island. Hostel accommodation is funded with a combination of direct grants and assistance for rents through the benefits system.

Rough Sleeping

129. The UK Government is committed to ending rough sleeping. The Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot for 2020 showed that there were 2,688 people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2020, a 37% decrease from last year. Rough sleeping levels more generally have fallen by 43% since 2017. The latest published data shows that by the end of January 2021, over 37,000 people have been helped in to long-term and/or emergency accommodation. The Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) is a scheme whereby local councils, working with other stakeholders such as charities, can apply for funding to provide move-on homes available as long-term assets, and accompanying support services to those who are currently, or at risk of, rough sleeping, to achieve a sustainable reduction in rough sleeping. RSAP is one of several measures to meet the UK Government's manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this parliament. 'Move-on' refers to accommodation and support made available on the basis that they are a pathway to settled accommodation, to help prepare occupants for independent housing within 2 years if possible. Furthermore, this year £52million will be allocated to substance misuse treatment services for people sleeping rough or at risk of doing so. During the pandemic, work was carried out to ensure the needs of those experiencing homelessness were met, including ensuring individuals are registered with a GP and receive substance misuse and mental health assessments where appropriate.

Facilitating Re-integration Recovery

130. The UK Government recognises the importance of employment in helping people make a sustained move off the streets and is collaborating with local authorities to provide employment support through, for example, jobcentres and national employment programmes. Examples include trained single points of contact in jobcentres and pilot schemes to improve local partnerships. Schemes such as the Plan for Jobs and the Work and Health Programme provide support to gain and maintain paid employment to those experiencing homelessness. The UK Government is also working to reduce the number of prison leavers that end up homeless and launched a £13m offender accommodation programme in July 2021 enabling access to the private rental sector for prison leavers that are at risk of homelessness on release. This is alongside the Community Accommodation Service, which will give 12 weeks of temporary accommodation for homeless prison leavers on their release.

Right to food

Food security

131. In 2019/20 the UK Government found that 92% of households in the UK were food secure, and is investing £200 million a year to continue the Holiday Activity and Food Programme which benefitted over 600,000 children last summer, including over 495,000 eligible for free school meals.¹² Pregnant women or parents with a child under 4, can apply to the Healthy Start Scheme to help them buy basic foods like milk or fruit. They can also get coupons to swap for pregnancy vitamins, breastfeeding vitamins and vitamins for children from birth to 4 years old. The value of Healthy Start Food Vouchers has increased from £3.10 to £4.25. The Nursery Milk Scheme allows registered childcare settings to reclaim the cost of providing one-third of a pint of plain cow's milk (or the equivalent in infant formula) to children under the age of five who attend the childcare setting for at least two hours per day.

132. Please see the section on tackling poverty for greater detail on measures to ensure vulnerable households can access support to buy essentials, including food.

Promotion of and access to healthier diets

133. The UK Government has implemented various schemes to improve access to a healthier diet for children. The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme provides over 2.2 million children, across 16,500 Primary Schools, with a portion of fresh fruit or vegetables school. The Healthy Start Voucher Scheme supports pregnant women and children aged between 1-4 years old from lower-income families to receive one £4.25 voucher every week. Children aged under one receive two vouchers, worth £8.50 in total, every week. The vouchers can be put towards healthy essentials such as fruit and vegetables, milk and infant formula. Recipients are also eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins. The UK Government is currently rolling out a digital approach to Healthy Start, to make it easier for families to apply for and use the scheme.

134. The Good Food Nation Bill will set out what the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies are doing to ensure people have access to adequate food, and help to ensure that reliable access to nutritious, locally sourced, locally produced, good quality food is a practical everyday reality for everyone in Scotland. The Human Rights Bill will incorporate the ICESCR right to adequate food into Scots law, as an essential part of the overall right to an adequate standard of living. This will then be directly justiciable in the Scottish courts. Eat Well Your Way is an online resource developed by Food Standards Scotland and helps consumers understand what a healthy balanced diet looks like in real and is due for public launch in January 2022.¹³

135. The Scottish Government has adopted a human rights approach to tackling household food insecurity, as set out in our statement on food insecurity and poverty. Where financial hardship does occur, the Scottish Welfare Fund and other discretionary support alongside holistic support services seek to ensure that households have emergency income to choose food that meets their needs and preferences and that they receive money advice to prevent future hardship. In 2020-21 we invested around £2.5 billion to support low-income households, including nearly £1 billion to directly support children and in October 2021 we published a consultation on a draft national action plan to end the need for food banks.¹⁴

Breastfeeding

136. Breastfeeding support is an integral part of the national Healthy Child Programme. To support families and babies and improve health and development outcomes during the early

¹² Free school meals guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk).

¹³ www.eatwellyourway.scot.

¹⁴ <https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/>.

years of infancy, an Early Years Healthy Development Review was carried out in July 2020. It sets out a vision for infant feeding support to be included as part of the Universal offer to all parents and carers, including help for breastfeeding, advice and early diagnosis of issues such as tongue-tie, and help with formula feeding where that is more appropriate.

137. National guidance has been revised and published for midwifery and health visiting services to support breastfeeding.¹⁵ The NHS Long Term Plan also sets out a commitment to ensure that all maternity services will begin the UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation process in 2019/20. This was introduced in recognition of the UK's low breastfeeding rates relative to other countries in Europe, and the variation in rates of breastfeeding across England. In addition, in October 2021 the UK Government committed £50 million to improve breastfeeding support services during the next Spending Review period. Funding will be made available to 75 local authorities to design and deliver a blended offer of advice and support that will create a supportive breastfeeding environment locally and help mothers to meet their breastfeeding goals. There is also strict legislation currently in place governing infant formula to regulate the labelling and marketing of infant formulae and follow-on formulae so as not to discourage breastfeeding.

138. The Scottish Government launched Best Start Foods (BSFs) on 12 August 2019. BSFs provides pregnant women and families with children under the age of three, who receive low-income benefits under a certain amount, with a minimum of £4.50 a week via a payment card to purchase healthy foods. BSF provides £18 every 4 weeks throughout pregnancy, £36 every four weeks from birth until a child turns one to support breastfeeding mothers or help with the costs of providing first infant formula milk, then £18 every four weeks from one until a child turns three. More than £6 million has been injected into NHS Boards and third sector partners for breastfeeding support to improve the quality of the support and the breastfeeding experiences of mothers helping them to breastfeed for longer. The Scottish Government also provides free Healthy Start vitamins to pregnant women for the duration of their pregnancy which has been in place since April 2017.

Taxation and marketing of junk food and sugary drinks

139. The UK Government's Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) came in to force across the UK in April 2018, having been first announced in March 2016, and is imposed on manufacturers and importers of soft drinks containing added sugar. It is designed to encourage producers to reformulate their overall product mixes by (1) reducing sugar content, (2) helping customers choose lower sugar and sugar-free brands, and (3) reducing portion sizes. Furthermore, a portion of the SDIL revenue raised has been reinvested in improving child health and wellbeing in England. The last progress assessment, published in October 2020, showed that between 2015 and 2019 there was a 43.7% reduction in the sales weighted average total sugar content in retailer and manufacturer branded SDIL drinks.

140. The UK Government is legislating to end the promotion of high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) products by volume (e.g., "3 for 2" offers) and location (e.g. at checkouts and ends of aisles) both online and in store in England, with new Regulations currently progressing through Parliament. The restrictions will apply to a specified list of product categories that are significant contributors to children's sugar and calorie intakes and are heavily promoted and will apply to medium and large businesses (50+ employees). Free refills of sugary soft drinks will be also prohibited in the out of home sector. This policy will be implemented in October 2022. Evidence suggests that children's exposure to HFSS product advertising can affect what children eat and when they eat. As detailed in our consultation response, which was published on June 24th 2021, we are introducing a 9pm watershed on TV and UK On-

¹⁵ Early Years High Impact Areas 3 Supporting Breast Feeding (May 2021) Early years high impact area 3: Supporting breastfeeding - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), Health Visiting and School Nursing service model (May 2021) Health visiting and school nursing service delivery model - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), Care Continuity between midwifery and health visiting services; principles for practice (May 2021). Care continuity between midwifery and health visiting services: principles for practice - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

demand programme services for HFSS product advertising and a restriction of paid-for HFSS advertising online via the Health and Care Bill by the end of 2022.

141. Lastly, it is key to ensure that nutritional labelling is presented in a way that allows families to make better informed food and drink choices that help them improve their health. We have taken the following measures:

- Front of Pack Nutrition Labelling: We will publish a consultation response as soon as possible;
- Out of home calorie labelling: On 13th May we introduced legislation to require large out-of-home sector businesses in England, including restaurants to provide calorie labels on their food products. This also extends to online sales. The legislation will come into force in April 2022.

142. The Scottish Government committed in its Programme for Government to introducing legislation on restricting the promotion of foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS foods) where they are sold to the public.

Access to health

143. Everyone living in the UK is entitled to register and consult with a General Practitioner (GP) free of charge, including temporary and undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers, travellers. National guidance from NHS England states that people do not need a fixed address or identification to register or access treatment at GP practices. To improve registration and use of primary care, GP practices must ensure their policies and practices are in line with NHS England guidance and consider the needs of potentially excluded members of their local population. The registration card campaign further reiterated this entitlement and includes a customer contact centre telephone number through which NHS England will follow up any case of inappropriately refused registration, and support patients to identify a GP practice in their locality that is accepting new patient registrations. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities produces the Migrant Health Guide, a free-to-use, online resource¹⁶ designed to support primary care practitioners in caring for patients who have come to the UK from overseas. It includes information on migrants' entitlement to the NHS, tailored health information specific to over 100 countries of origin and evidence-based guidance on a range of communicable and non-communicable diseases and health issues.

144. The Welsh Government introduced The Enabling Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (2018) action plan committing it to a series of actions to facilitate access to healthcare, goods and services on an equal basis with other communities. Furthermore, Welsh Government policy implementation guidance on Health and Wellbeing Provision for Asylum Seekers and Refugees aims to address issues and concerns raised in relation to the provision of primary and secondary services to refugees and asylum seekers. It provides direction and a template for health boards in Wales to develop consistent local protocols, policy and practice to ensure continuity of healthcare and equity of access for asylum seekers and refugees.

145. The Northern Ireland Executive has Strategic Planning Groups in place to ensure that the healthcare needs of groups such as Traveller and Roma communities, and also asylum seekers and refugees are adequately met.

146. Any person resident in Scotland who the United Kingdom authorities have reasonable grounds to believe are victims of Human Trafficking, are exempt from NHS charges during the recovery and reflection period while they remain in Scotland. Asylum seekers in Scotland, including those people whose claim for asylum has been refused, are entitled to register with a general practitioner to receive general medical services. They can also access specialist healthcare if needed, on the same basis as any other resident patient, often through a GP referral, including maternity care and mental health services. A number of people from Afghanistan will be arriving in Scotland under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy scheme. COVID-19 health information is available on NHS Inform in the two main

¹⁶ Migrant health guide – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

languages used in Afghanistan: Dari and Pashto. In response to the pandemic, legislation came into force on 30 January 2020 to allow anyone in Scotland, regardless of nationality or residence status, access to NHS services for the diagnosis and/or treatment of Covid, at no charge.

147. The refreshed health literacy action plan, ‘Making it Easier’, published in 2017 supports improved navigation of the health and care system, including for refugees and asylum seekers. The Self-Management Fund, administered by the ALLIANCE on behalf of the Scottish Government has provided £26 million since 2009 to support new projects by third sector organisations and partnerships, to supporting people to live well with their conditions, based on the understanding that they are in the driving seat of their care. The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 aims to improve people’s experiences of using health services and encourage them to take part in decisions about their health and wellbeing and provide them with the information and support they need to do so. It also provides the right for people to give feedback, raise concerns or make complaints about the care they have received.

Mental health

148. The UK Government is committed to achieving parity between mental and physical health services and to reducing mental health inequalities. In England, the NHS Long Term Plan, outlines Government aims to expand and transform mental health services and invest an additional £2.3 billion a year by 2023/24. This will enable an extra two million people to be treated by NHS mental health services. In 2021/22, 14.8% of local health spend is due to continue being allocated to Mental health, up from 14.0% in 2019/20 and 13.1% back in 2015/16. We are also providing around an additional £500 million in this financial year [2021/22] to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need, and invest in the NHS workforce.

149. In England and Wales, mental health legislation was subject to a thorough Independent Review which reported in 2018. The UK Government responded this year in its White Paper setting out plans to reform the Mental Health Act, which will strengthen the rights of patients to influence their care and treatment, support work underway to tackle the disproportionate detention of people from ethnic minority backgrounds and help to ensure those detained are treated with dignity and respect. We will also further limit the Act’s provisions to detain people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

150. Following the UK Government’s consultation on the aforementioned White Paper, the Welsh Government announced that a series of reforms will be introduced to improve the rights of individuals and ensure the accessibility, availability and quality of mental health care and provision. Following the introduction of the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019 by the UK Government, the Welsh Government will also be implementing the new Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS), to deliver improved outcomes for people who lack mental capacity who are deprived of their liberty, and their families, by creating a new simplified legal framework which is compliant with Article 5 (right to liberty) and Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Welsh Government has also agreed to the inclusion of Wales in reforms to the Mental Health Act 1983, which will enhance the rights and protections for people detained under the Act.

151. In Northern Ireland a new Mental Health Strategy 2021-31¹⁷ was published, in June 2021, outlining the strategic direction for mental health services and a blueprint for reform of the current system.

152. Similarly, in 2018 the Bailiwick of Jersey commenced the Mental Health (Jersey) Law 2016 which makes provision for the assessment and treatment in approved establishments of individuals suffering from mental disorder; for the treatment of patients without consent; and for certain measures for the safeguarding of mentally disordered patient’s rights. The Capacity and Self-Determination (Jersey) Law 2016 makes provision for, among other things,

¹⁷ Available at: [Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/mental-health-strategy-2021-2031).

the assessment and determination of mental capacity and as to the best interests of persons lacking capacity.

Mental health care in prisons

153. Pre-custody, the NHS Liaison and Diversion services operate at police stations and criminal courts to identify and assess people with vulnerabilities, such as mental health problems, and refer them into appropriate services and, where appropriate, away from the justice system altogether. During custody, healthcare providers can decide whether to provide mental health treatment on the basis of identified clinical needs and provide a variety of different treatments. During the COVID-19 pandemic extra measures were put in place to ensure ongoing access to physical and mental health services for prisoners. Post-custody, the NHS is introducing a RECONNECT service, to ensure those leaving prison engage with community-based health services to provide healthcare support and avoid them returning to the criminal justice system. This commitment to providing effective mental health care in prisons is echoed by the Welsh Government. Their Partnership Agreement for Prison Health includes a priority to develop new standards for mental health services for prisons in Wales.

154. In Scotland, an independent review of mental health legislation will ensure future reforms focus on enabling and empowering people with mental illness, respecting and protecting human rights and responsibilities, assisting recovery, and supporting family and other relationships. The Review is due to report in September 2022 and will make recommendations that give effect to the rights, will and preferences of the individual by ensuring that mental health, incapacity and adult support and protection legislation reflects people's social, economic and cultural rights, including those under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and ECHR requirements.

Social care for older persons

155. Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010) and under the NHS Constitution people have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against because of their age. On 7 September 2021 we committed to investing an additional £5.4 billion over three years to begin a comprehensive reform programme, including £3.6 billion to reform the social care charging system and enable all local authorities to move towards paying providers a fair rate for care; a further £1.7 billion to begin major improvements across the social care system in England; and at least £500 million in new measures to support the development/wellbeing for the social care workforce over the next three years. On 1 December 2021 we published *People at the Heart of Care*, setting out our 10-year vision and priorities for reforming adult social care. In March 2022, we published the integration white paper, *Joining up care for people, places and populations*, outlining our commitment to join up our health and care services, to better address patients' needs. Furthermore, as of February 2022, 84% of all social care settings were rated Good or Outstanding.

156. The UK Government understands that workforce supply is crucial in meeting the health and care needs of older people. The number of doctors working in the specialty of neurology in hospitals and community health has grown by 20.9% from 1,325 full time equivalent (FTE) in 2016 to 1,603 in 2021, supporting the diagnosis and treatment of older people with neurological challenges.

157. The UK Government recognizes the need for effective training regarding the diagnosis and care of people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, alongside a program of rigorous training in the general treatment of health conditions in older people. In 2015, the 'Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia 2020' was launched to make sure that dementia care, support, awareness and research were transformed by 2020. As of 2020, 137 Trusts had signed up to the Dementia Friendly Hospital Charter, over one million NHS and one million social care staff had received basic dementia awareness training since 2012, and we exceeded the commitment to spend £300m on dementia research over five years to 2020, spending £420 million over the five-year period.

158. The UK Government is committed to ensuring that older people can live with the dignity and respect they deserve. We spend over £129bn on benefits for pensioners in Great Britain. This includes nearly £105bn spending on the State Pension in 2021/22. The State Pension is the foundation of financial support for people in retirement. Since 2011, the basic State Pension has increased in both real terms and relative to average earnings. In 2021/22 the basic State Pension is £2,050 higher in cash terms than in 2010. Pension Credit provides financial support for pensioners who have been unable to build up sufficient income through the State and private pension systems. The UK Government is committed to bearing down on levels of pensioner poverty; there are now 200,000 fewer pensioners in absolute poverty than there were in 2009/10.

159. Having carried out a Carer Review, the UK Government is concerned by the evidence presented by peers and the disability sector during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in relation to the existing measures to protect and support people who have been abused or are at risk of abuse in their own homes by those providing their care. Therefore, the UK Government is reviewing the existing protections and the support available to victims. The UK Government reinforced their commitment as part of the National Disability Strategy launched on 28 July 2021. A report will be finalised in 2022.

160. On 24 March 2021 the Cabinet Secretary for Health and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People published a statement of intent which set out the Scottish Government's commitment to develop a new strategy for older people's health and social care in Scotland.

Termination of pregnancy

161. Since the Committee's last report in 2016, the UK Government has made a number of steps towards reforming abortion law in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (NIEF) placed a duty on the UK Government to reform Northern Ireland's abortion law by 21 October 2019. The legislative changes resulted in the immediate decriminalisation of abortion through the repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (OAPA), which came into effect on 22 October 2019. Additionally, any police investigations or prosecutions currently underway at that time, in respect of the above sections of the OAPA will not be carried out, and no criminal proceedings may be brought or continued.

162. The UK Government introduced the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No.2) Regulations 2020, to govern access to abortion services in Northern Ireland. These Regulations set out the terms of the conditions in which abortions can be provided in Northern Ireland; namely the circumstances set out in the 2018 Report of United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women report, Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Report), as required by section 9 of the NIEF Act.

163. The UK Government also introduced the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021, which gives the Secretary of State a power to direct the Northern Ireland administrations to commission abortion services, consistent with the conditions set out in the 2020 Regulations. On 22 July 2021, the UK Government issued a direction to the Northern Ireland Department of Health, the Minister of Health, and the Health and Social Care Board to commission and make abortion services available by no later than 31 March 2022. The UK Government also directed the Northern Ireland First and deputy First Minister that once proposals on the commissioning of abortion services are brought forward by the Department of Health, they must be included on the agenda at the next meeting of the Executive Committee. The UK Government is continuing to work with the Northern Ireland Department of Health, and other relevant Northern Ireland departments, on the full commissioning of abortion services, and the full implementation of the other recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the CEDAW Report by the deadline of 31 March 2022 and will continue to take further steps where necessary to ensure that women and girls have access to abortion services to which they have a right.

164. The Abortion Reform Act 2019 in the Isle of Man decriminalised abortion making it possible for women have a termination on request within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, under specified circumstances during the 15–24-week period, and in certain situations after 24 weeks. Local counselling services are in place and are available to women before and after a termination.

Education

165. The UK Government is committed to helping as many students as possible to achieve high level qualifications and has put in place support programmes to assist students including those in receipt of Special Educational Needs or Disability education. The UK Government is investing £2.6 billion over the next three years into delivering new special and alternative provision places across the country that will help every young person fulfil their potential. The UK Government has also begun a process of reforming qualifications at various levels to improve progression and outcomes for students. Since 2017, over £100m of additional support has been allocated to improve educational outcomes and social mobility in 12 of the most deprived parts of England. This is done through, for example, improving school standards, attendance, teaching quality and recruitment, careers training and advice, literacy and maths skills, and tackling barriers to learning that exist “beyond the school gates”, including mental health issues. The UK Government is also investing £300 million to transform ‘Start for Life’ and family help services in half of the council areas across England and has increased the pupil premium to more than £2.5 billion this year to help them to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities.

166. Indeed, taking the threshold of strong GCSE passes in English and maths (grade 5 or above), the white British group ranks 11th in attainment (out of nineteen ethnicity categories). Chinese and Indian ethnic groups outperform the white British group on this measure by wide margins.¹⁸ New evidence indicates that GCSE attainment is closely related to socio-economic status – once this is controlled for, all major ethnic groups perform better than white British pupils on average except for pupils from the black Caribbean/Mixed white and black African ethnicity groups.¹⁹ Lastly, a higher percentage of young ethnic minority people progress to university compared with young white British people.²⁰

167. Furthermore, over 40% of pupils who are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT) of Irish heritage are recorded as eligible for free school meals. Over the last two years the UK Government has invested in GRT education areas and catch-up tutoring, to improve educational attainment and pathways to education and employment for GRT children and young people.

168. The Welsh Government recently announced its Renew and Reform plan, setting out how it will allocate funding to support learners and practitioners in the period of recovery from Covid19. Following a review of current education policies, a new Strategy for Educational Equity will be introduced to reduce educational inequalities. The Pupil Development Grant aims to overcome barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds from achieving their full potential. It provides funding to all eligible learners, to mitigate the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes and assist with funding for school and extra-curricular essentials such as uniforms and other resources. The Welsh Government’s Early Childhood Education and Care approach is built on an understanding of child development and of putting the needs of the child, regardless of background, at the heart of provision.

169. In Northern Ireland an Expert Panel on educational underachievement published its report on 1 June 2021 identifying eight key areas and 47 actions for change.

¹⁸ GCSE English and maths results - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk).

¹⁹ Table 3 - Microsoft Word - Strand_2021_Report to CRED.docx (ox.ac.uk).

²⁰ Free School Meals, Gender and Ethnic Group’ from ‘Widening participation in higher education’, Permanent data table – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk).

170. In Jersey, since 2015, significant development and policy work has been completed to reduce attainment gaps, particularly for those children from low-income families, such as the Jersey Curriculum (revised 2014) and the Policy for the Education of Children Looked After (updated 2020). Additional funding has been introduced to give children from all backgrounds equal opportunities to benefit from education, under the Jersey Premium Policy (reviewed 2021). A draft Languages Policy (2021) is currently under consultation, which will support the implementation of measures to reduce discrimination or segregation of students based on their national origins.

171. Guernsey is in the process of implementing the recommendations of the National Association for Special Educational Needs review for children with SEND requirements, in which economically disadvantaged children are disproportionately represented. Work is underway to improve the curriculum design to specifically address the needs of more school-dependent learners, and the Children and Young People's Plan contains measures to support vulnerable groups, including identifying those who are in receipt of uniform allowance as a priority.

Higher education

172. The UK Government is committed to a sustainable funding model for higher education (HE) which supports high value provision, meets the skills needs of the country, and maintains the world-class reputation of our HE providers.

173. Since 2012, the maximum tuition fee cap for a standard, full-time undergraduate degree in England has only increased once – by £250, to £9,250 in 2017 – and the UK Government has recently announced that maximum fee caps will be frozen again for the 2022/23 academic year. This represents the fifth year in succession that fee caps have been frozen, delivering a reduction in real terms that provides better value for students and keeps the cost of HE under control.

174. The student loan system in England removes financial barriers for those hoping to study HE while sharing its costs fairly between learners and general taxpayers. Eligible students can apply for up-front loans to meet the full costs of their tuition fees. Additionally, the UK Government has announced that maximum grants and loans for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year will increase by a further 2.3%, with students from the poorest backgrounds receiving record levels of support in cash terms. After finishing study, student loan repayments are linked to income, not to interest rates or the amount borrowed. Repayments are made only on earnings above the relevant repayment threshold, and borrowers are protected; if their income drops, so do their repayments. Any outstanding debt is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower.

175. In 2021, we had record rates of English 18-year-olds and record rates of disadvantaged 18-year-olds accepted to full-time university. That year saw 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds being 82% more likely to go to university than in 2010.

176. The Scottish Government pays tuition fees for eligible full-time Scottish domiciled students studying for their first undergraduate degree at Scottish higher education institutions. These students are also eligible to access free funded university places. Bursaries and student loans are available to ensure that Scottish-domiciled university students are able to support themselves. A minimum income guarantee provides living-cost support (through a mixture of bursaries and loans) of up to £7,750 to students from the poorest households.

177. In Jersey a scheme to reduce HE costs, has been introduced on an interim basis, with plans for a permanent scheme to be presented to the Assembly in early 2022, to combat the declining number of Jersey students choosing to attend university. Currently the scheme applies to students commencing university in September 2018, 2019 and 2020, and covers the following:

- Tuition fees: up to £9,250 per year where household income is below £110,000, tapering down to £925 for households with an income of up to £200,000;

- Maintenance costs: up to max £7,500 per year where household income is up to £50,000, tapering down to £1,500 per year for those from households with income of up to £90,000;
- Distance learning course fees: means tested reimbursement of up to £7,400 per year;
- Additional tuition fees: for students studying to be a doctor, dentist or vet.

178. Guernsey provides means-based financial support to students who wish to travel off-island to undertake university study. From August 2021 all English universities now treat Guernsey residents as ‘home’ students which will reduce the fees required to attend.

Irish Language

179. Since the Committee’s report in 2016, progress has been made on the matter of legislating for and promoting the Irish language by both the UK Government and the parties of the Northern Ireland Executive. In January 2020, the NDNA deal was reached by all five Executive parties, the UK Government and the Government of Ireland. Central to this deal was a carefully balanced package of legislative measures pertaining to language, identity and culture in Northern Ireland. This package will make provision for:

- An Office of Identity and Cultural Expression;
- An Irish Language Commissioner and official status of the Irish language;
- A Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.
- The Irish Language Commissioner, once in post, will support the development of the use of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. They will do this by providing advice, guidance and best practice standards, particularly for public authorities to follow.

180. The UK Government made a commitment on 21 June 2021 via Written Ministerial Statement to introduce the legislation in the UK Parliament. The UK Government is making the necessary preparations to introduce the legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

181. In line with the UK Government’s own NDNA commitments, it has provided Northern Ireland Screen, the national screen agency for Northern Ireland, with £2 million to support a broadened remit of the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund and the Ulster Scots Broadcasting Fund. The broadened remit of both broadcasting funds will support the growth and development of production in the Irish language and Ulster Scots, with a particular focus on educational, interactive and digital content. This builds on the UK Government’s work to ensure that the BBC Framework Agreement now includes a specific clause which provides a clear commitment for the BBC to continue to deliver output in the Irish and Ulster Scots languages. The UK Government also agreed in NDNA to provide further funding to support languages in Northern Ireland, including Irish, which the UK Government plans to announce in the coming year.

Other Recommendations

Optional Protocol

182. The UK considered its position on accepting the right of individual petition (the Optional Protocol) to the UN beyond the CEDAW and the CRPD. It concluded that the benefits of the communication procedure remain unclear, especially for the applicant. The UK Government believes effective domestic laws already exist where individuals can seek enforceable remedies if their rights have been breached. It is possible for an individual to challenge any government decision in the domestic courts if their rights have been breached.

Various HR instruments

183. The UK Government considers that with regard to the Convention on Enforced Disappearance the current domestic framework already prevents arbitrary arrests, prohibits torture and degrading treatment, and holds the Security and Intelligence Agencies to account. Similarly, the UK Government considers that the rights of migrant workers and their families are already protected in domestic legislation through the UK Borders Act 2007. Similarly, the Modern Slavery Act 2018 combats slavery, human trafficking, and provides protection to victims. The UK Government is therefore unclear about the benefits of ratifying these Conventions, and it has no current plans to do so.

184. Both the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure contain provisions already enabled within the UK's domestic framework. Rights are further protected under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 through which any individual whose rights have been breached may seek suitable remedy. The UK's position on Optional Protocols is set out above.

General Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

185. The UK implements treaty obligations in a mainstreamed manner, with relevant departments ensuring that any legislation, policy and guidance etc accords to the UK's domestic and human rights obligations. We will give further consideration to the development and strengthening of effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms at all levels.

Stakeholder engagement

186. The UK Government regularly communicates with all devolved administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories on the implementation of the recommendations contained the Committee's concluding observations and will continue to do so. As mentioned in paragraph 1 of this report, the UK's report has been prepared with the input of all of the above. Additionally, the UK Government engaged and undertook stakeholder consultation with non-governmental organisations and civil society groups in the production of this report, seeking general views of actions under this Convention.
