

UK GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT FOLLOWING HER VISIT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM 27 JUNE TO 1 JULY 2022

1. Overall Human Rights Landscape

1.1. Ensuring an enabling environment for human rights and Human Rights Defenders

The UK is a country which prides itself in upholding human rights both at home and abroad. As a country, we are enriched through a diverse range of communities, cultures and faith which define the strength and outlook of our modern United Kingdom.

The UK has a well-established system for human rights protection, both in terms of our domestic institutions and the international instruments to which we are bound, as the Commissioner for Human Rights' report notes. Since the founding of the Council of Europe, the UK has been an active defender of the institution's values: freedom, liberty, and the rule of law. We have defended these values both domestically (including through the Devolved Administrations) and throughout Council of Europe member States.

The UK works with our partners, civil society and human rights defenders to encourage all states to defend democracy and freedoms and to hold those who violate human rights to account. Our Annual Human Rights and Democracy Reports are an important part of this work. The FCDO continues to support a range of priority issues, such as freedom of religion or belief, gender equality and media freedom to name a few, in both our policy and programme objectives.

In July 2022, we demonstrated our commitment to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) by hosting an international Ministerial conference on FoRB, bringing together over 800 faith and belief leaders and human rights actors, and 100 government delegations to agree action to promote and protect FoRB. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

We are proud to have ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2022. Ratifying this Convention sends a strong message about the UK's commitment to tackling domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, and helps us to continue to lead the way in tackling these terrible crimes.

The UK also has a long history of a vibrant and independent media, underpinning the values of our democracy. The UK has long supported media freedoms, both at home and in supporting the development of a strong and independent media in countries overseas. The UK has risen nine places on the Global Press Freedom Index since last year, to number 24 out of 180 countries in the 2022 Index.

The Online Safety Bill will also bring huge improvements for adult safety online. Platforms will have duties to tackle illegal content and companies will also have to provide adult users with tools to keep themselves safer.

The UK also champions media freedom as part of the Executive Group of the Media Freedom Coalition, working publicly and privately to support journalists globally. During our time as co-chair of the Coalition, we established key working practices to help oversee the Coalition's work, oversaw the issuing of over 20 statements highlighting the importance of the Media Freedom and raising the spotlight on numerous situations of concern.

This Government will always act to respect the rule of law and uphold the independence of the judiciary, and is fully committed to making sure that judges can act free from any influence or political motivation. Any personal attacks on the judiciary are completely

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unacceptable. It is also important to respect the right of lawyers to act independently for litigants: that is an integral feature of our justice system.

The UK Government welcomes the Council of Europe's work on the protection of the profession of lawyer and the UK is represented on the Committee of Experts on the Protection of Lawyers. We believe that the profession of lawyer plays a central role in the administration of justice, the defence of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We communicate the importance of human rights, rule of law and democracy at the highest levels of Government. [The Foreign Secretary recently remarked that](#) "human rights, and transparent democratic government, are in the interests of all people, all economies and the long term stability of every nation. That is why I believe in human rights. There are now 8 billion people on this planet, and each and every one should be able to enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms, as set out in the Universal Declaration and subsequent Conventions, and I will do all I can as Foreign Secretary to ensure that they can".

[The Prime Minister has also emphasised](#), "freedom and openness have always been the most powerful forces for progress [...] We will evolve, anchored always by our enduring belief in freedom, openness and the rule of law and confident that, in this moment of challenge and competition, our interests will be protected and our values will prevail."

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1.2 The Bill of Rights

The Human Rights Act 1998 ('the HRA') has been in force for over 20 years. This Government was elected with a 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.' We need to make sure that the UK's human rights' framework continues to meet the needs of the society it serves. The Bill of Rights ('the Bill') will allow us to remain a State Party to the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), while allowing us to fully avail ourselves of the margin of appreciation afforded to states under the ECHR. Our proposals in the Bill are about setting the right approach for the UK.

The UK Government will continue to champion human rights at home and abroad, including as a leading member of the Council of Europe, and will maintain the UK's leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law. The Bill will protect the same ECHR rights as the HRA. We are also reinforcing human rights by strengthening protection of the right to free speech and giving greater prominence to recognising trial by jury.

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, UK courts should consider the meaning of rights in a distinctively UK context, and consider the UK's own common law tradition, in coming to decisions while having due regard for the ECHR. The Bill aims to encourage courts not to adopt unduly expansive interpretations of rights. The Bill does not change our obligation under Article 46(1) of the ECHR to abide by adverse judgments in cases where the UK is a party. With regards to the adoption of new positive obligations, the Bill ensures that Parliament will decide whether and how they should be recognised in UK law, bearing in mind the margin of appreciation. UK courts engage in useful dialogue with the European Court of Human Rights ('the ECtHR') about the meanings of rights in the UK context and more broadly, and we are keen to see that continue.

We are very grateful to Sir Peter Gross and the Independent Human Rights Act Review (IHRAR) panel for their valuable contribution. We considered the IHRAR report as we developed the Bill. The UK Government will continue to promote best practice consistent with its human rights obligations by ensuring that all appropriate training and information is available to public authorities. In addition, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) will continue to perform their role of promoting awareness, understanding and protection of human rights, and encouraging public authorities to comply with human rights law.

In terms of education, in England and Wales citizenship is a compulsory part of the National Curriculum in secondary schools. Pupils are taught about the nature of rules and laws and the justice system, including the role of the police and the operation of courts and tribunals. Pupils are also taught about human rights and international law and the legal systems in the UK, different sources of law, and how the law helps society deal with complex problems.

As a dualist state, Clause 24 of the Bill clarifies the legal status of interim measures in domestic law.

The provisions in the Bill state that domestic courts may not have regard to any interim measure issued by the ECtHR when deciding whether to grant relief which, if granted, may affect the exercise of an ECHR right. Our proposals in the Bill have been developed as part of its wider objective of setting the right approach for the UK, consistent with our international obligations as a party to the ECHR.

As we have long indicated, we are concerned about the application of the ECHR to overseas conflicts. Current case law on extraterritorial jurisdiction goes beyond the intent of the

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ECHR's drafters and brings international human rights law into conflict situations that are classically governed by the law of armed conflict. Clause 14 signals our commitment at domestic level to the principle that the law of armed conflict, rather than international human rights law, should apply in the context of military operations overseas.

Claims relating to breaches of ECHR rights will still be able to be brought through alternative domestic remedies, in line with our obligations under the ECHR. As the Commissioner notes in her report, the exclusion for military operations overseas will not commence unless and until the alternative remedies are in place.

1.3 The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act and subsequent proposals

Protests and Demonstrations

We agree with the Commissioner that protests are a legitimate way for individuals to express collectively disagreement with, or demand improvements in, laws, policies and practices. However, in recent years we have seen protestors deliberately disrupt the general public. That is very different to the incidental disruption that the Commissioner suggests are to be expected. The UK Government does not believe it is right that protestors should be able deliberately to delay their fellow members of the public from going about their lawful business. Consequently, we have taken measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022 ('the PCSCA') – and will take more in the Public Order Bill – to target deliberate disruption, including of key national infrastructure.

The ECHR rights to freedom of expression and assembly are not absolute rights. It is therefore legitimate for governments to restrict those rights in certain circumstances. We believe our approach gets the balance right and we do not believe these measures will have a "chilling effect" on those who wish to protest within the law.

As suggested by the Commissioner, we will be monitoring the implementation of recently introduced powers. For example, we intend to publish data on the use of the new stop and search powers.

Minority groups, especially Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - Unauthorised encampments

The UK Government agrees with the need to recognise the rights of travellers to live a nomadic way of life. However, these rights must be balanced with the rights of landowners and permanent residents who live in the vicinity and are adversely affected by unauthorised encampments. It is right for the UK Government to protect citizens who are adversely affected and to deter unauthorised encampments from being set up in the first instance.

The UK Government disagrees that there has been a "de facto criminalisation" of nomadic communities. The PCSCA creates a new offence for England and Wales and an accompanying power for the police to seize property (including vehicles) where individuals reside or intend to reside on land with a vehicle. The offence will be committed if a person who resides or intends to reside with a vehicle on land fails to leave the land or remove their property without reasonable excuse when asked to do so and they have caused, or are likely to cause, significant damage, disruption, or distress. This new offence is only committed where "significant" damage, disruption or distress occurs, a high threshold. Through amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by the PCSCA, we have broadened the types of harms that provide police with a power to direct trespassers away, to now include the situation where a trespasser causes damage, disruption or distress. This allows the police to tackle the wide range of harms suffered by landowners and communities in a proportionate manner.

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Due to the threshold of the new offence and the requirement for the police to act in a manner compatible with relevant ECHR rights and the Equality Act 2010, it is our view that this power represents a proportionate means of preventing harms suffered by landowners and communities.

The new measures, and enforcement of them, are not and will not be based on race or any other protected characteristic. The measures will apply to anyone who causes or is likely to cause harm in the conditions described: those who seek to occupy other people's land and property without permission, and cause harm.

The police decision to exercise the new powers, as is the case with all existing powers available to the police, is discretionary and is an operational matter for the police. Decisions on enforcement and prosecution will be made on case-by case basis by police and the Crown Prosecution Service. We expect the police to continue to consider their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and obligations under the ECHR (as incorporated into UK law). This includes considering the potential impact that issuing a direction to leave, arresting a person, or seizing a vehicle may have on the families involved and on the vulnerable, before taking an enforcement decision. It is expected that proper welfare enquiries will be carried out and, where necessary, the appropriate agencies will be involved as soon as possible.

The UK Government is aware that many unauthorised sites are generated by travellers moving from one location to the other, and therefore more traveller sites would help to address the issue where there is inadequate provision. That is why the UK Government has launched £10 million of capital funding for 2022/23 on 20 March 2022, to support local authorities in England, in building new transit and permanent sites, temporary stopping places to reduce the number and associated costs of unauthorised encampments and provide families with access to safe and secure places to stop, suitable facilities, access to local services such as health and education and provide authorised sites that meet their needs.

The UK Government has made clear that local housing authorities in England are under a duty to assess the housing needs of their area and ensure that appropriate traveller sites are provided for the travelling community. This duty sits alongside the national planning policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites. These planning policies set out a framework in which local planning authorities are to develop fair and effective strategies to meet and address these needs.

Local authorities are required to make their own assessment of need for travellers and to set pitch targets for travellers in the development plans. These plans are robustly tested by an appointed Inspector before they can be adopted by the authority. Planning decisions must be made in accordance with such plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Local authorities are best placed to make decisions about the number and location of such sites locally, taking into account a number of factors, in accordance with national policy and local circumstances, including their broader legal obligations.

It is the UK Government's assessment that the current duties and policies impose sufficient requirements on local authorities in terms of what they must do to provide these sites.

Data from the Traveller Caravan Count in England indicates that the number of caravans on authorised sites has increased from 14,498 in July 2010 to 20,043 in July 2019 (an increase of 38%), showing that the locally-led planning system is working in delivering more authorised sites. Regarding introduction of a statutory duty to require that local authorities provide authorised sites for travellers, as the Committee set out in its report, section 6 of the

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Caravan Sites Act 1968 originally imposed a duty on local authorities to exercise their powers [under section 24 of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960] “to provide adequate caravan sites for gypsies residing in or resorting to their area”.

The duty under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 was repealed by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. There was a concern that the duty to provide sites at public expense was not sustainable and that the basis on which the duty to provide sites was made, had changed.

The UK Government looked at delivering the objectives of reducing unauthorised encampments and providing adequate sites for travellers in an alternative way, essentially by encouraging more travellers to provide their own sites through the existing planning system. This was also in recognition of the fact that most travellers would prefer to find and buy their own sites to develop and manage. Recognising this, planning policy seeks to promote more private site provision whilst also recognising that not all travellers can afford to own their own site.

Local authorities, and social housing providers can bid for funding through the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme which includes funding for permanent traveller sites and transit sites. Councils are also rewarded via the New Homes Bonus for providing more authorised traveller pitches (benefiting from the affordable tariff, which pays more). We consider the new duty proposed by the Commissioner on local authorities is unnecessary as there are current policies and programmes in place for the provision of authorised sites. In addition, the new offence created through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 will apply only where significant harms have taken or are likely to take place—site provision is not therefore a factor.

1.4 The rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

The UK’s approach to inadmissibility has been a long-standing feature of our asylum system and is consistent with the Refugee Convention as individuals will be removed to a safe third country where they will not be refouled, and a person’s rights will be met should they be declared a refugee.

The UK does not consider inadmissible asylum claims. Asylum claims are declared inadmissible if the person travels through safe countries to enter the UK or has a connection to a safe country where it is considered reasonable to expect them to have sought protection. It’s an established principle that people should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach.

The UK is delivering new laws to tackle abuse and illegal entry, a points-based immigration system welcoming people around the world, and legal routes for those most in need, like those fleeing conflict or persecution around the world. The Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership (‘the Partnership’) will mean migrants who make journeys to the UK by dangerous and unnecessary methods will have their asylum claim processed in Rwanda, and if they require protection, they will be supported to build a new and prosperous life there.

The UK Government is pleased that the High Court has upheld the legality of the Partnership.

The Partnership meets our international legal obligations and is fully compliant with both national and international law, including the ECHR. There is nothing in the UN Refugee Convention which prevents removal to a safe country. Additionally, the arrangement requires Rwanda to process claims in accordance with the Refugee Convention and ensuring

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protection from inhuman and degrading treatment or for those recognised as having a protection need, from being returned to the place they originally fled.

People should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach – that is the fastest route to safety. We know there are many people in difficult situations around the world – the UNHCR estimates approximately 100 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. The UK cannot possibly accommodate everyone who might wish to come here.

The UK offered formal UK-EU arrangements on the readmission of third-country nationals (in line with precedent in this area) and the family reunion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The EU did not have the mandate from Member States to negotiate these issues with the UK - as such no agreement was reached. We will pursue new bilateral relationships on post-transition migration issues with key countries with which we share a mutual interest. In line with our domestic political commitments (Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020), these will include new arrangements for the family reunion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The UK Government has been clear that measures within the Nationality and Borders Act are compliant with our international obligations under the ECHR and the Refugee Convention.

In his [statement to the House of Commons](#) on 13 December, the Prime Minister set out a number of steps the UK Government is taking to tackle the issue of illegal migration, building on other measures such as the new deal with France. New steps included tackling the asylum backlogs and cutting down processing times from months to weeks; doubling the number of caseworkers to help clear the asylum backlog by the end of next year; re-engineering the end to end process by reducing paperwork and interviews; and bringing in specialist caseworkers for processing different nationalities. On accommodation, further work will be done on securing alternatives to move migrants out of expensive hotels, including using disused holiday parks, former student halls and surplus military land, with 10,000 spaces already identified. We continue to work with local authorities to ensure everyone takes their fair share of asylum seekers across the UK, following the consultation on plans over the summer. We are also working with the Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) following their ad hoc visit to the UK in November 2022.

The refugee family reunion policy allows immediate family members as defined in the Immigration Rules of those granted protection in the UK to join them here, if they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country. This policy also makes clear the discretion to grant visas outside the Immigration Rules, which caters for extended family members in exceptional circumstances. There are additional safe and legal routes for people to come to the UK should they wish to join family members here, work or study. They would need to meet the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rule under which they were applying to qualify for a visa.

In his statement to the House of Commons on 13 December, the Prime Minister also announced procedural changes to the UK's National Referral Mechanism for Modern Slavery, to ensure victims of modern slavery are identified effectively. These changes are in line with the UK's international legal obligations.

The UK and Albanian governments have also agreed a joint communique to strengthen our co-operation on migration. This will advance our joint work on combatting illegal migration and to ensure that Albanian nationals who have been victims of trafficking and modern slavery can be provided with protection and have their recovery needs met in their home country.

1.5 The rights of LGBTI people, especially trans persons

Trans people and trans discrimination

The UK has a proud history of advancing LGBT+ rights, and has one of the world's most comprehensive and robust legislative protection frameworks for LGBT+ people. The UK Government is clear that we want people who are transgender to be able to live their lives as they wish.

It is crucial that we ensure everyone is treated fairly in all aspects of life, so that they can thrive and reach their full potential, including transgender people. The Equality Act 2010 provides protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation across a number of grounds, including gender reassignment.

With regards to instances of verbal and physical abuse, the UK Government takes all forms of hate crime seriously, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate crimes. We are clear that victims should be supported and the cowards who commit these hateful attacks should feel the full force of the law.

As for experiences of bullying in schools, all children and young people must be treated fairly. There is no place for hate or prejudice in our education system. We are providing over £2 million of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2023, to five anti-bullying organisations to support schools to tackle bullying. This includes projects targeting bullying of particular groups, such as those who are victims of hate-related bullying, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic based bullying.

Legal Gender Recognition

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) provides a clear mechanism for people to change their legal gender. During our consultation on reforming the GRA in 2018, we wanted to ensure the Act was fully considered and all opinions were heard.

As announced in September 2020, we believe the current provisions in the GRA are effective and allow for those who wish to legally change their sex to do so.

We want to ensure the process of applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) should be modern and affordable. Applicants for a GRC are now only required to pay a nominal fee, making the process more affordable, and the newly developed digital application process for GRCs launched in June this year.

In addition to modernising the process of applying for a GRC, we are taking meaningful action to address historical problems that have resulted in long waiting times to access specialised gender services by:

- establishing a more modern, flexible care model to support trans people;
- working to tackle long waiting times for Gender Identity Services; and
- establishing new pilot gender clinics, the first of which was opened by Chelsea and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust in July 2021.

Conversion Practices

We remain committed to protecting everyone from conversion practices and making sure everyone can live their life free from the threat of harm or abuse. The UK Government is

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giving careful consideration to the results of our public consultation on the issue and will outline next steps in due course.

In the meantime, in October, we launched a support service for anyone affected by or at risk of conversion practices, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender. It comprises a helpline, instant messaging service, and website. This service is run for the Government by the LGBT safety charity GALOP.

1.6 The extradition of Julian Assange and implications for media freedom

Mr Assange's case currently remains before the UK courts. The presence of an independent judiciary in considering extradition requests in the UK safeguards against political interference, either domestically or internationally, in the extradition process.

In this case, the UK courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr Assange. Nor have they found that extradition would be incompatible with his human rights, including his right to a fair trial and to freedom of expression, and that whilst in the US he will be treated appropriately, including in relation to his health. He will be not be extradited until all appeals processes are complete and Mr Assange has applied to the High Court for permission to appeal against both the Home Secretary's decision to order extradition, and the District Judge's decision to send his case to the Home Secretary.

The UK is committed to the international rules based order and unequivocally supports upholding freedom of speech and a free press. Mr Assange's case is not about the UK Government position on freedom of expression or a free press, but the rule of law whereby all individuals requested for extradition are treated equally by our independent courts complying with the provisions of the Extradition Act 2003.

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2. Children's Rights

2.1 General issues in relation to the protection of children's rights

Incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The UK Government is dedicated to promoting children's rights in all aspects of society and ensuring the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is reflected in domestic legislation. The UK Government has a wealth of existing domestic legislation which gives effect to the UNCRC and safeguards the rights of children.

In England, careful consideration is given to the UNCRC when developing new legislation, and policy is regularly assessed to ensure compatibility with the UNCRC. If any change in the law is needed to comply with a particular treaty, the UK Government introduces necessary legislation. [The Cabinet Office Guide to Making Legislation](#) (2022), covers the procedures to be followed in preparing primary legislation, highlighting the importance of giving due consideration to the UNCRC. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017 demonstrate that UK Government considers children's rights when introducing laws.

The UK Government strives to find new ways to promote children's rights and recognises that strengthening children's rights is a continuous process.

In Wales, children's rights are enshrined under The Rights of the Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The Children's Rights Scheme 2021 outlines arrangements for Ministers to give due regard to the UNCRC, which includes a revised CRIA process, where all CRIs are published. The Welsh Government provides funding to Children in Wales to support Ministers to reflect the child's voice in policy.

In Scotland, the UNCRC Bill aims to incorporate the UNCRC and Optional Protocols 1 and 2 into law; and to make Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments mandatory in certain circumstances. These are already promoted widely, and findings are taken into consideration to adapt policy.

The Northern Ireland Executive adopted the Children and Young People Strategy (2020) which promotes children's wellbeing and progresses children's rights until 2030. Some departments have used Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIs) in developing policies, although there is no formal CRIA process in place.

Protection of children's rights through the HRA

The UK Government laid the IHRAR report in Parliament alongside its consultation on reform of the HRA in December 2021, on proposals to update the HRA and replace it with the Bill of Rights.

In preparing the consultation, the UK Government carried out an initial examination of the proposals from an equalities perspective, including impacts on children. The UK Government assessed responses to this consultation and published a full impact assessment alongside the Bill.

Instruments to protect the social and economic rights of children

At present the UK has ratified the 1961 European Social Charter (ESC), the European Code of Social Security and numerous other international social rights instruments.

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The UK has a strong track record on meeting its commitments to social rights which we are proud of. The UK Government supports the work of the Council of Europe and continues to support the European Social Charter. The UK reserves its right to consider ratification of the revised Charter and related Protocols on a national basis. The UK's approach as far as ratification of international treaties is concerned has always been to do so only when UK law and practice are compatible with obligations it would undertake.

National measures to protect children's rights

The UK Government introduced a CRIA template in 2018 to ensure that UNCRC articles are considered during policy development. Whilst CRIAs are not mandatory, training on the UNCRC and the use of CRIAs in policymaking is widely promoted and encouraged across Government. During the pandemic, in 2021/22, CRIAs were used for the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

2.2 Poverty

Welfare and Benefit System

The Commissioner notes that the devolved administrations have different competences for benefit payments. The report mainly focuses on the UK-wide system, which impacts all parts of the UK.

The UK Government is committed to supporting low-income families and in 2022/23 we will spend over £108 billion on welfare support for people of working age.

To protect the most vulnerable and ensure support for those with the lowest incomes, the UK Government has committed to uprating benefits for working age households and disabled people, as well as the basic and new State Pensions, by 10.1 per cent from April 2023, in line with inflation. The UK Government is also increasing the National Living Wage by 9.7 per cent to £10.42 an hour from April 2023.

A key rationale behind Universal Credit (UC) is to give people who are able, responsibility for their own budgeting. Claimants are free to spend their benefit as they see fit, in light of their individual commitments, needs and preferences. The UK Government also provides Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) where appropriate for UC claimants who cannot manage their single monthly payment and there is a risk of financial harm to the claimant and/or their family. Every person has different circumstances and requirements. Income-related benefit rates are not made up of separate amounts for specific items of expenditure such as food or fuel charges therefore, there is no objective way of deciding what an adequate level of benefit should be.

UC replaces a complicated system where benefit recipients faced 'cliff edges', meaning support was lost when working more than 16, 24 or 30 hours, making it truly universal. UC supports people who are on a low income or out of work and helps to ensure that they are better off in work than on benefits. It provides claimants with the support they need to prepare for work, move into work, or to earn more if already in work through progression.

The UK already spends more on family benefits than any other country in the G7, at 3.2% of GDP (OECD, 2017 data) and there are no current plans to abolish the benefit cap.

The benefit cap provides a strong work incentive and fairness for hard-working taxpaying households and encourages people to move into work, where possible. The most vulnerable who are entitled to benefits for disability and/or caring are exempt from the cap.

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The UK Government firmly believes that where possible it is in the best interests of children to be in working households and the benefit cap provides a clear incentive to move into work. Getting claimants back into work remains our primary concern and, of course, returning to employment will significantly increase the likelihood of a household not being affected by the cap.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions undertook the statutory review of the benefit cap levels in November 2022 and decided they should be increased in line with CPI in the year to September 2022 (10.1%) in April 2023. This will ensure that households will see an increase in their benefit following 2023 up-rating.

The UK Government has also made a number of permanent changes to UC. UC work allowances were increased in 2019 – benefitting millions of working households. The UK Government has also cut the Universal Credit taper rate from 63% to 55% and increasing Universal Credit work allowances by £500 per year so that 1.7 million households will keep, on average, around an extra £1,000 on an annual basis.

The UK has legislated to ensure that families will continue to receive a child element amount for any children born before 6 April 2017. Child Benefit continues to be paid for all children as well as an additional amount for any disabled children.

There are no current plans to remove the two-child limit within Universal Credit. The UK Government's view is that providing support for a maximum of two children ensures fairness by asking families in receipt of benefits to make the same financial decisions as families supporting themselves solely through work. Families who support themselves solely through work would not usually see their wages increase simply because of the addition of a new child to their family. We recognise that some claimants are not able to make the same choices about the number of children in their family; that is why exceptions have been put in place to protect certain groups.

Exceptions apply to third and subsequent children who are additional children in a multiple birth - all children in a multiple birth other than the first child. An exception also applies to third and subsequent children where they are likely to have been born as a result of non-consensual conception. For this purpose, non-consensual conception includes rape, or circumstances in which the claimant was in a controlling or coercive relationship with the child's other biological parent at the time of conception.

An exception also applies to any children in a household who are:

- adopted when they would otherwise be in local authority care;
- living long term with friends or family and would otherwise be at risk of entering the care system; or,
- under 16 living with their parents or carers and have a child of their own (until they make a separate claim upon turning 16).

The UK Government has also provided £37 billion in Cost of living support which includes Cost of Living Payments (paid in 2 lump sums of £326 and £324) to more than 8 million low-income households on Universal Credit, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Pension Credit, with separate one-off payments of £300 to pensioner households alongside the Winter Fuel Payment and £150 to individuals receiving disability benefits.

In 2022/23 the UK Government have announced a further £26 billion in cost of living support including up to £900 in Cost of Living Payments for households on eligible means-tested

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benefits. A £300 payment to be made to pensioner households and individuals in receipt of eligible disability benefits will receive a £150 payment.

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. In 2020/21, the proportion of children in absolute poverty in the UK (before housing costs) was 16% (2.3 million). Since 2010, there are nearly 1 million fewer workless households (UK). The number of children growing up in homes where no one works has fallen by 590,000 (since 2010) and 1.7 million more children are living in a home where at least one person is working.

The UK Government believes that the best and only sustainable way of tackling child poverty is through work. That is why with 1.187 vacancies across the UK our focus is on supporting parents people into and to progress in work. Our approach is based on clear evidence about the importance of employment, particularly where it is full-time, in substantially reducing the risks of poverty.

To help people into work our Plan for Jobs is providing broad ranging support for all Jobseekers with our Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAP), Job Entry Targeted Support and Restart scheme. We are also extending the support Jobcentres provide to people in work and on low incomes. Through a staged roll-out, which started in April 2022, around 2.1 million low-paid benefit claimants will be eligible for support to progress into higher-paid work.

The decision to remove the child poverty targets set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 was driven by the need to encourage a longer-term focus. Setting targets can drive poorly targeted action that focuses on moving the incomes for those ‘just in poverty’ above a somewhat arbitrary ‘poverty line’ whilst doing nothing to improve long-term outcomes for children. When the UK government abolished the targets, it 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.

Food Security

As the Commissioner’s report notes, the provision of free school meals is a devolved issue. The UK Government supports the provision of nutritious food in schools in England, which ensures pupils are well nourished, develop healthy eating habits and can concentrate and learn. Under the benefits-based criteria, 1.9 million of the most disadvantaged pupils in England are eligible for and claiming a free school meal (FSM). This saves families around £400 per year.

The UK Government spends around £600 million per year ensuring an additional 1.25 million infants enjoy a free, healthy and nutritious meal at lunchtime following the introduction of the Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM) policy in 2014. Benefits-based free meals were extended to disadvantaged students in Further Education institutions in 2014.

FSM has been permanently extended to children from no recourse to public funds (NRPF) households, subject to income thresholds. This has been in place since the start of the 2022 summer term. Transitional protections were put in place to ensure no child will lose their eligibility for free school meals during the rollout of Universal Credit.

Core schools funding has increased, including the “FSM factor” in the National Funding Formula having increased to £470 per eligible pupil this year. The FSM factor is intended to broadly reflect the costs schools face in providing school meals. It will increase from £470 to £480 in 2023-24. In total, we spend over £1 billion each year on free meals. This includes

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around £600 million on UIFSM, where the per meal rate has been increased to £2.41, and backdated to April 2022 in recognition of recent cost pressures.

The latest published statistics show that around 1.9 million pupils are claiming FSM. This equates to 22.5% of all pupils, up from 20.8% in 2021. Together with a further 1.25 million infants supported through the UIFSM policy, 37.5% of school children are now provided with FSM. In setting a threshold, the Department for Education believes that the current level, which enables pupils from households on the lowest incomes to benefit from FSM, while remaining affordable and deliverable for schools, is the right one. The Department for Education will continue to keep FSM eligibility under review, ensuring that these meals are supporting those who most need them.

2.3 Police and justice

Stop and search and strip search

The UK Government is committed to supporting the police to use their powers without fear or favour to keep our streets safe. Stop and search is a vital tool to tackle crime, which is why we have relaxed restrictions on Section 60 stop and search powers, used in anticipation of violence, and are empowering officers to be able to stop and challenge known knife carriers.

Every knife seized through stop and search is a potential life saved. In 2021-22, stop and search removed around 14,900 weapons and firearms from our streets and resulted in almost 67,000 arrests.

Nobody should be stopped and searched because of their race and extensive safeguards such as statutory codes of practice and body worn cameras exist to ensure that this does not happen.

Safeguards also exist to protect children who are subject to stop and search, including a statutory requirement to consider their safety and welfare. When police are using these powers on a child consideration must be given to the safety and welfare of the child and the power must be in a manner appropriate to the child's age and carried out in a way that de-escalates the situation.

As the '[Inclusive Britain](#)' report set out, we intend to enhance these safeguards through the development of a national framework for scrutiny of stop and search by local communities, and consideration of any unnecessary barriers to increased use of body worn video.

The UK Government supports the police in the fair use of strip search if they deem it operationally necessary to do so. Strip search plays an important role in the detection and prevention of crime, as well as the protection of individuals, communities, and police themselves. It is one of the most intrusive powers available to the police and its use must be fair, respectful and without unlawful discrimination. Any use of strip search should be carried out in accordance with the law and with full regard for the welfare and dignity of the individual being searched, particularly if that individual is a child.

We recognise that strip search can be traumatic for children and the impact upon their welfare should not be underestimated. The police's use of strip search is regulated by legislation and statutory guidance which makes clear that strip search powers should not be used as a matter of routine and takes due regards for the wellbeing and safeguards of children.

As we committed to in the Inclusive Britain report, we are developing a new, national framework for scrutiny of police powers by local communities. We are also supporting

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policing partners and the Ministry of Justice to develop scrutiny panels for the use of strip search and to pilot 'opt-out' legal advice for children, and why we have introduced custody data collection for police forces.

Use of Force

There are occasions when it is essential for police to use force in order to protect the public and themselves from harm. The UK Government is clear that when police are required to use force to achieve a lawful objective, such as making an arrest, acting in self-defence or protecting others, all use of force must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary in the circumstances. When the difficult and often time critical decision to use force is taken, police officers are accountable, through the law, for their actions.

The UK Government approves less lethal weapons for use by police in line with Articles 2 and 3 of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms which states that law enforcement officials should have access to weapons allowing for differentiated uses of force. Before officers can be authorised to deploy with less lethal weapons, they must undergo comprehensive training which reinforces the importance of legitimacy in police use of force and trains officers to factor in the potential vulnerabilities of a person, including their age and size. All officers are taught skills for de-escalation.

Children in the Criminal Justice System

We note the Commissioner's recommendation to review the age of criminal responsibility. However, we do not have any current plans to change the threshold from 10. We believe that setting the age of criminal responsibility at 10 years provides flexibility in dealing with children and allows for early intervention in a child's life, with the aim of preventing subsequent offending.

We believe that prosecution is not always the most appropriate response to offending by children.

The age and maturity of a child is always taken into account when considering the most appropriate response to offending. Most children aged 10-14 are diverted from the youth justice system or receive an out-of-court disposal.

Equal Protection from Violence

The UK Government is absolutely clear that violence or abuse towards children is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Unless children are at risk, the Government does not want to interfere in how parents, or those acting legally in the place of parents, bring up their children. It is the responsibility of the parent to discipline their children, appropriately and within the boundaries of the law. The UK Government is aware that Scotland and Wales have passed legislation to remove the legal defence of reasonable punishment; however, for the reasons outlined above there are no plans to do so in England.

Corporal punishment was abolished in schools in Northern Ireland under The Education (Corporal Punishment) Order 1987, and the review into restrictive practices makes recommendations where further progress can be made. The (Childminding and Day Care) Minimum Standards (amended 2018) outlines requirements for registered childcare facilities, with children under 12, to promote positive behaviour strategies.

2.4 The right to participation

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The UK Government welcomes the Commissioner's acknowledgement that, across the United Kingdom, there is a body of good practice to strengthen the involvement and meaningful participation of children and young people in decision-making. The Government acknowledges that voting is an important way in which citizens can participate in the democratic process of our country. However, it is not the only way of doing so, especially for young people who have not reached voting age. They can do this in many different ways, from involvement in organisations such as the Youth Parliament, learning about how our democracy works, or campaigning on issues they care about.

The UK Government is committed to ensuring that young people are given the chance to have their voices heard. That is why, the UK Government supports the British Youth Council (BYC) which aims to offer young people aged 11 and over the chance to articulate their views and passions to the UK Government and the general public.

The issue of lowering the voting age has been regularly debated in the UK Parliament, most recently on 28 January 2022. On each occasion it was pushed to a vote in the UK Parliament, proposals to lower the voting age were defeated.

The UK Government is committed to enabling meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels. Grant funding is provided to the UK Youth Parliament programme, and the Youth Engagement Grant is used to fund the Youth Policy Development Group, which engages Ministers to influence policy. The Young People's Board includes children with experience of migration that share views with the UK Government. The Family Justice Young People's Board works with the UK Government to deliver improvements to the family justice system (England and Wales).

The UK Government recognises the importance of raising awareness of the UNCRC. In June 2022, the UK Government submitted its report and annexes to the UN Committee. As part of the reporting process, the UK Government engaged over 5,000 children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities and experience of the family justice system and migration, to understand their views, whilst raising awareness of the UNCRC. The themes of discussions included: levels of understanding of children's rights; climate change; age discrimination; experience of discrimination; right to equal education; and adequate housing.

Following the submission of the report the UK Government are carrying out further engagement, to find out how the Government can communicate more effectively with children and young people and raise awareness of the UNCRC. The UK Government published a child-friendly infographic of the report, alongside three child-friendly videos. Also, on this year's Universal Children's Day (20 November 2022), the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho MP, wrote to children [and young people](#), to update them on the action the Government is taking to protect and promote their rights.

The Department for Education launched the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy in April 2022. The strategy includes two major initiatives, that will allow and encourage children from all backgrounds and in all locations, rural or urban to take climate action on a local and broader scale and feel empowered through practical positive action.

The Welsh Government's engagement model ensures children have opportunities to express their views, including annual opportunities for each Minister to hold discussions with children. The Welsh Government provides funding to Children in Wales, who facilitate a monthly Young People's Board to gather perspectives on Welsh Government policies. The Welsh Government worked in partnership with the Children's Commissioner to design a survey to seek children's views during the pandemic, which informed the Welsh

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Government's approach to communicating with children. Wales has an established Youth Parliament that influences decision-making.

The Progressing Human Rights of Children in Scotland Action Plan 2018-21 demonstrates Scottish Government's commitment towards mainstreaming the participation of children in policymaking. In 2020, Scottish Government published guidance, with children, to support professionals that engage with children on their decision-making. Scotland has an established Youth Parliament and Children's Parliament that engages annually with Ministers at Cabinet meetings since 2017. The Scottish Government works with Civil Society to support children's participation, including through Young Inclusion Ambassadors.

In Northern Ireland, a Youth Assembly has been established (2021), and children have discussed issues such as Education, Health, and Rights.

Grant funding is provided to the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) programme which is made up of approximately 300 democratically elected members aged 11-18. Members are elected to represent the views of their young constituents to Government. Members engage with senior officials and ministers on policies and decisions that impact their lives to influence policy making. The UK Government recognises this is a vital programme through which young people can engage with policy and decision makers, and have a say on issues that matter to them, and has committed £750,000 funding to continue the programme from 2023-2025.

The UK Government is working together to support young people to have a strong voice on climate and environmental issues, including through COP events and associated activities. This included involving young people in the COP26 'Youth and Public Empowerment Day'. The youth-led event, 'The Nature of Our Future: the role of young people in climate solutions with nature', provided a platform to showcase the work and initiatives of young people and their role in driving ambition, developing solutions and delivering nature based solutions to climate change.

The UK Government has also consulted young people, including through the UKYP, on issues including, climate change, net zero and COP events through roundtables, meetings and workshops.

The UK Government has consulted the UKYP and children with special educational needs on the UNCRC reporting round. The themes of discussions included: levels of understanding of children's rights; climate change; age discrimination; experience of discrimination; right to equal education; experience of discrimination; and adequate housing.

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3. Northern Ireland

3.1 Dealing with the legacy of the troubles

The UK Government is grateful for the Council of Europe's continued engagement on matters relating to the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and notes the recommendations within the Commissioner for Human Rights' report. The UK Government provided substantive responses to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's (NIHRC) Rule 9 submission ([here](#)), and to questions posed by the Council of Europe ([here](#)), in August 2022. The UK Government refers to these documents in response to the specific issues raised by the Commissioner for Human Rights.

The current mechanisms for addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past provide positive outcomes for very few families and victims and survivors. There are a relatively small number of cases currently with prosecutors or coroners, but a significant majority of criminal cases - approximately 1,000 - remain outstanding with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We simply cannot rely on the same mechanisms to process these cases, as any potential outcomes will come far too late for many.

The UK Government recognises the unique context that exists in Northern Ireland, and the measures that have been taken previously to set significant precedents and materially alter how legacy issues are dealt with in Northern Ireland. This includes the early release of prisoners, restricting prison time to just two years for Troubles-related offences, an amnesty for the process of secretly decommissioning paramilitary weapons, and the immunity provided to individuals who share information with the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains. Immunity from prosecution has also been utilised as part of a number of previous inquiries into Troubles-related matters.

The UK Government is determined to deliver better outcomes for those most impacted by the Troubles while helping society to look forward. This is why it is seeking to establish a new way forward via the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy & Reconciliation) Bill ('the Legacy Bill'), which will establish the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery to conduct independent reviews into Troubles-related cases. The Commission will be able to carry out full, police-equivalent criminal investigations where that is required, including in discharging the Article 2 & 3 procedural obligation. The ICRIR will be supported by the provision of all necessary police powers, and a legal requirement of full disclosure by state bodies.

The UK Government recognises, however, that the legislation is challenging for many, and has been engaging extensively with all interested parties, including victims and survivors, regarding their concerns.

As a result of this engagement, the UK Government announced on 23 November that it will introduce amendments in a number of key areas once the Legacy Bill reaches the next phase in the parliamentary process, Lords Committee Stage.

Firstly, the UK Government intends to make absolutely clear on the face of the Legacy Bill that the new Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery will be able to carry out criminal investigations in any cases where this is considered appropriate, to provide reassurance regarding its ability to meet our ECHR procedural obligations.

We also intend to strengthen confidence in the Commission's independence by stipulating that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must consult individuals and bodies before appointing the Chief Commissioner, and have regard to relevant international experience in appointing Commissioners. These amendments are intended to go some way to allaying

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concerns that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's role in the establishment and oversight of the Commission should be consistent with ensuring that the Commission is independent and seen to be independent.

The UK Government has also announced that it will introduce amendments to strengthen significantly provisions related to conditional immunity. The key change is to introduce a new, imprisonable offence for those who knowingly or recklessly make false statements to the Commission, including as part of an application for immunity from prosecution. Individuals who are found to have knowingly lied to the Commission in order to obtain immunity from prosecution will therefore not only face a potential custodial sentence for that offence, but will also automatically have their immunity from prosecution revoked. This is a significant addition that increases the robustness of the process, therefore helping to better achieve our primary aim of effective information recovery, and ensures that those who provide false information remain liable to prosecution.

The UK Government has also set out that it will amend the Sentences 1998 Act so that individuals who refuse to engage with, or are not granted immunity by, the Commission, and are subsequently convicted, are unable to apply for early release under the provisions of that Act, and are instead liable to serve their full custodial sentence. This provides a significantly increased incentive for individuals to engage fully with the information recovery process, whilst providing a strong punishment for those who do not and are ultimately convicted.

In addition, the UK Government proposes to raise the level of the financial penalty for individuals who – without good reason – fail to provide the Commission with information and evidence when requested to do so - further increasing incentives to cooperate.

These amendments seek to address concerns that have been raised by stakeholders, including at the Council of Europe, and the UK Government will engage on the detail of the proposed amendments with interested parties in advance of Committee Stage.

The UK Government also acknowledges that, while it has proactively announced a number of amendments ahead of Committee Stage, concerns will remain. The UK Government therefore commits to continue to engage meaningfully and constructively, and to consider potential changes very carefully, as the Legacy Bill progresses through both Houses of Parliament. While it is vital to recognise that a perfect solution to legacy issues is not attainable, the UK Government will continue to work towards the best practical solution to provide better outcomes for all those most impacted by the Troubles.

3.2 Wider issues of human rights protection in Northern Ireland

The UK Government is fully committed to its obligations under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Bill of Rights will not affect the ongoing discussions on reform of the Northern Ireland Protocol ('the Protocol') and is compatible with our commitments in the Withdrawal Agreement with regards to Article 2 of the Protocol. Our proposals will have no adverse impact on any future developments towards a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.

The UK Government is firmly committed to Article 2 of the Protocol which ensures no diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity protections set out in the relevant chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement - including anti-discrimination rights set out in the six relevant EU directives.

This reflects the UK Government's unwavering commitment to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, and serves to acknowledge the role that EU law has played in delivering on the guarantees of equality and rights that are an integral part of the Agreement.

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The UK Government is wholeheartedly committed to upholding the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its parts, 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 for Northern Ireland. This approach was always envisaged in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

The New Decade, New Approach Agreement on the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland contained a commitment to establish an Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights that is faithful to the stated intention of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Committee's report was approved by the Assembly following a debate on 14 February 2022.

It is the joint responsibility of all the parties to implement those commitments made within the New Decade New Approach Agreement in order to ensure the political institutions deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

We are pleased that the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions agreed to grant the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's (NIHRC) request for a six-month deferral on their accreditation, which we supported. This will allow the recommendations of an independent review – the terms of which were agreed jointly by the UK Government and the NIHRC – to be published, and responded to by the UK Government.

The UK Government provides funding to the NIHRC to fulfil its statutory duties, which include the protection of rights set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and its participation in the Dedicated Mechanism to monitor Article 2 of the Northern Ireland Protocol. We are absolutely committed to ensuring the Commission has the ability and resources to carry out its statutory functions, and we are in regular communication with the Chief Commissioner and staff regarding the important work that the Commission carries out.

3.3. Media freedom, safety of journalists, and threats to other groups

A free press is important and is one of the cornerstones of our democracy.

Policing and Justice in Northern Ireland is devolved, including the responsibility to enforce laws around freedom of speech. Whilst the UK Government retains responsibility for national security matters in Northern Ireland, it is the Northern Ireland Executive and NI's Department of Justice that lead on tackling wider paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) are responsible for protecting the people of Northern Ireland, and bringing to justice those responsible for threatening the personal safety of others.

3.4 Other human rights issues in Northern Ireland

Integrated Education

Regarding integrated education, the UK Government firmly believes that greater integration within education is an essential aspect of the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland.

This was affirmed in the Belfast 'Good Friday' Agreement, which called for 'the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education'.

There are many schools across Northern Ireland that are working to promote integration, including in the Controlled and Catholic Maintained sectors, as well as integrated schools.

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However, according to the NI Department of Education's own figures, mixing of pupils from different backgrounds remains low across Northern Ireland, and access to integrated schools is not what it should be with 7% of pupils attending one.

The UK Government recognises the vital importance of integrated education, which the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement states is as essential to the reconciliation process and the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society.

The UK Government wants to see progress in this space and for every parent to be able to have a proper choice of schools, including an integrated school for their children if they so wish.

The more we can educate children together, the brighter a future we can build for Northern Ireland's young people, one where children grow up in a shared society, able to look forward rather than back to a divided past.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

On 2 December, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland formally instructed the Department of Health to commission abortion services in Northern Ireland, in line with the commissioning framework and service specification for abortion services. This follows on from his announcement on 24 October that the UK Government would commission abortion services.

The Secretary of State has a clear statutory duty in section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 in relation to abortion and sexual health in Northern Ireland. This duty requires him to ensure that the recommendations in the Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women ("the CEDAW Report"), are implemented in Northern Ireland.

This is a specific and unique duty which arose from Parliament voting to protect the rights of women and girls. The UK Government has only stepped in where necessary to ensure the implementation of the specific recommendations of the 2018 report of the UN CEDAW Committee.

The UK Government has given the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Department of Health every opportunity to bring forward measures to introduce the full provision of abortion services. Regrettably they have failed to deliver for women and girls in Northern Ireland.

Funding for abortion services for the current financial year (22/23) will be ring fenced within the Department of Health budget. The UK Government will continue to ensure that funding for abortion services is made available. Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive to fund abortion services in Northern Ireland.

Where a woman needs abortion care that is not currently available in Northern Ireland, for example for late term complications with pregnancy, she will continue to be able to access UK Government funded NHS services in Great Britain.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is committed to ensuring that his statutory duty is fulfilled in relation to implementing the recommendations in the Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Report), in Northern Ireland.

This means ensuring that age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early

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pregnancy and access to abortion is made a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents.

As a devolved matter, our preference remains for the Northern Ireland Department of Education to take the necessary steps to ensure CEDAW compliant Relationships and Sex Education is made a compulsory part of the curriculum.