

Two written answers from the Department of Health and Social Care

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (119388):

Question : To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of how many additional health professionals he needs to recruit to NHS England in 2022-23. (119388)

Tabled on: 07 February 2022

Answer:
Edward Argar:

The Department has made no specific estimate. In July 2021, the Department commissioned Health Education England to work with partners to review long term strategic trends for the health workforce and regulated professionals in the social care workforce. The Department has also recently commissioned NHS England to develop a workforce strategy which will set out its conclusions in due course.

The answer was submitted on 22 Mar 2022 at 11:16.

This is a strange reply. How can the NHS have put in a large demand for extra cash when it has no idea how many extra people it needs or wants? Wages and employment costs are its main item of spending.

How can it claim to have a serious working plan to get the waiting lists down if it is not recruiting a decent number of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals to carry out the operations and treatments needed?

What do the senior managers administrators do that prevents them from knowing how many staff they need? What signal does it send to medical schools and potential students that the near monopoly employer still does not have a plan to recruit more staff?

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (119392):

Question:
To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what forecast he has made for the likely increase in staff costs for 2022-23 for NHS England. (119392)

Tabled on: 07 February 2022

Answer:
Edward Argar:

A forecast has not yet been made. The Government is seeking pay recommendations from the independent Pay Review Bodies (PRBs) for most public sector workers not in multi-year pay and contract reform deals. Remit letters were issued to the PRBs in November 2021. As the PRBs are independent, the Government cannot pre-empt the recommendations, which we expect to receive in May 2022.

The answer was submitted on 22 Mar 2022 at 16:18.

This reply confirms that the NHS had not forecast the detailed spending needed to get waiting lists down when it was agreed to impose a tax and send that cash to the NHS. I find this surprising. Surely NHS managers need to know staff numbers and staff costs before submitting a bid for more money for waiting lists?

What estimate has the Environment Secretary made for the amount of land that will be taken out of agricultural production as a result of schemes and plans for wilding over the next two years?

This reply does not detail how much land the UK government will pay for to convert away from growing food. Given the enthusiasm for more domestic food and the supply difficulties in the global system we need to make sure we have the land available to expand UK food production. The UK does less than most overseas Agriculture departments to support domestic supply.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (141109):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the amount of land that will be taken out of agricultural production as a result of schemes and plans for wilding over the next two years. (141109)

Tabled on: 16 March 2022

Answer:

Victoria Prentis:

Wilding or re-wilding is the restoration of ecosystems to the point where they are more regulated by natural processes.

Although appropriate only in certain situations, this is something the Government is already supporting through projects such as peatland restoration funding or agri-environment schemes. Defra is also in the process of reviewing and developing an approach to rewilding that takes into account environmental and land use priorities. We will initiate ten Landscape Recovery projects between 2022 and 2024 that will, among other things, help restore wilder landscapes. The focus of these will be on large-scale sites where there are opportunities to significantly enhance the landscape to deliver a wide range of environmental outcomes.

Over the next two years it is expected that the amount of land moving from agriculture production into wilding projects will have no substantive impact on food production.

The answer was submitted on 24 Mar 2022 at 16:12.

President Biden's gaffes

When President Trump was in office the U.K. media and some on this site sought to argue that most of what he said was unacceptable. Now we have President Biden making a string of dangerous gaffes in a series of worrying international conflicts these critics of the USA go quiet.

President Biden's premature, sudden and ill judged withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan was unhelpful. President Trump wanted to get the troops home but made it conditional, leaving him unable to withdraw before the election as he wished. Joe Biden did not bother about conditions and did not understand he was giving the country to the Taliban after 20 years of fighting them. He failed to consult allies. Once he had done it he threw away all the lives and treasure spent on trying to build an Afghan democracy. He also let the Presidents of China, Russia, North Korea and others think the West was weak, allowing them scope to plan power grabs of their own.

Tested in Taiwan he then misspoke in too tough a way. He invented a military guarantee of Taiwan's independence which the US has never expressly granted. His staff rushed out a reiteration of the official policy of studied ambiguity. The US might go to war over Taiwan. The President accepted the correction.

Worse was to come over Ukraine. The President before Putin had crossed the borders with troops said his response would be more modest if any Russian incursion was limited. It seemed to give a green light to Russia grabbing more of the Donbas and may have egged Putin on with his military plans.

Now we have the President saying he wants regime change in Russia. Commentators and the public can wish that but if the President says it US resources have to be deployed to achieve it. His staff moved quickly to deny it is a US policy aim.

This is all unhelpful. Relations with countries like Russia, China and North Korea need consistent firmness from the leader of the free world. There must be no doubt what the rules are or where the red lines lie.

Taxes and sovereignty

When Parliament fell to debating various versions of a Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and the EU some of us had no wish to enter binding arrangements with the EU that could continue to prevent us making sovereign decisions for ourselves through elections and Parliamentary votes. I along with 27 other Conservative MPs voted three times against Mrs May's Withdrawal legislation because it did not restore full Parliamentary sovereignty. We tried to get her to insert a sovereignty override clause to reassure us that in the event of disputes with the EU we could legislate ourselves out of trouble, but she refused. Indeed her advisers said to put in such a clause would render the Agreement void as it undermined the rights of the EU built into it.

When we were asked to support Mr Johnson's versions of the Agreement we again expressed misgivings about parts of it, particularly over fish and Northern Ireland. The government agreed to insert the all important sovereignty clause. It assured us the parts of the Agreement we did not like would be improved in the Future Trading Agreement, and were by any chance they to still fall short then we would have the ultimate lock of a proper sovereignty clause. It was on that basis the EU Withdrawal Act passed. It is important today to remind people just how comprehensive Clause 38, the sovereignty clause is. It leaves no one in any doubt Parliament is sovereign and can exercise its sovereignty as it wishes, whatever interpretation the EU may place on the ambiguous Withdrawal Agreement.

The immediate issue is VAT in Northern Ireland. I see no clause in the Protocol which says the UK Parliament cannot change taxes in Northern Ireland if it wishes. If government lawyers think there is some issue, then they should furnish the government with the draft clause for the VAT legislation which uses the sovereignty powers in Clause 38 to ensure the removal of VAT from NI transactions as well as GB transactions is legal.

Clause 38 of the Withdrawal Act:

Parliamentary sovereignty

(1) It is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom is sovereign.

(2) In particular, its sovereignty subsists notwithstanding—

(a) directly applicable or directly effective EU law continuing to be recognised and available in domestic law by virtue of section 1A or 1B of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (savings of existing law for the implementation period),

(b) section 7A of that Act (other directly applicable or directly effective aspects of the withdrawal agreement),

(c) section 7B of that Act (deemed direct applicability or direct effect in relation to the EEA EFTA separation agreement and the Swiss citizens' rights agreement), and

(d) section 7C of that Act (interpretation of law relating to the withdrawal agreement (other than the implementation period), the EEA EFTA separation agreement and the Swiss citizens' rights agreement).

(3) Accordingly, nothing in this Act derogates from the sovereignty of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Tax for the NHS and social care

As a long standing critic of the OBR and Treasury models and poor forecasts let me clarify. I do support the need for Treasury financial discipline. One of the Treasury orthodoxies I always supported was the one which said you should not hypothecate or give a tax to a particular area of spending.

The Treasury rightly pointed out there was rarely a single tax which raised just the right amount of money for a given service. If you found one or created one, there was no guarantee that the revenue from that tax would grow at the right rate for the service. It was always possible the tax would be more buoyant than the financial needs of the service making it difficult to rein in the tax and the spending. It was also possible the tax from time to time would be insufficient. There would then be remorseless pressure for the Treasury to provide a top up from general taxation.

I was therefore surprised when the current Treasury changed its mind and invented a new hypothecated tax. Indeed they invented two. This year it is to be a supplement to National Insurance. Next year it is to be a new social care tax. These new taxes have been born of controversy. Here are some questions I would like to see the government answer.

1. How will the money from these taxes be moved from assisting the NHS to social care? What is the timetable or trigger points to scale back the cash to the NHS and put it into social care?
2. As social care currently costs taxpayers around £40 bn and is paid for

out of general taxes and out of local authority taxes, how will the future settlements of these sums be calculated bearing in mind the top up money coming from the dedicated tax? What has been gained by ring fencing a proportion of the cash when far bigger amounts still rest on annual negotiation between local government, social care and Treasury?

3. The government has now announced a substantial increase in the threshold before anyone pays National Insurance. Has this reduction in the money from the ring fenced tax been agreed by the NHS and by social care? How has this been possible? does it mean they can now manage with a smaller tax or will there be more top up money? When can we see the spending plans behind this? We would like to know what the new tax is buying.