

Update on GP Appointments

Having raised the issue of GP appointments with the Secretary of State and Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England I was pleased to learn that NHS England has directed GPs to ensure that they are offering face to face appointments:

Dear colleagues

UPDATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) TO SUPPORT RESTORATION OF GENERAL PRACTICE SERVICES

Guidance on the phased easing of Covid-19 restrictions continues to be issued by government, in line with the Coronavirus roadmap out of lockdown, with services following and adapting accordingly.

As such, ahead of government rules on social distancing changing from 17 May, we would like to draw your attention to the Standard Operating Procedure which will be published shortly, and which will update and replace previous guidance.

- **Half of all general practice appointments during the pandemic have been delivered in person, GP practices must all ensure they are offering face to face appointments.** As the chair of the Royal College of GPs has said 'once we get out of the pandemic and things return to a more normal way of living and working, we don't want to see general practice become a totally, or even mostly, remote service', so while the expanded use of video, online and telephone consultations can be maintained where patients find benefit from them, this should be done alongside a clear offer of appointments in person.
- Patients and clinicians have a choice of consultation mode. Patients' input into this choice should be sought and **practices should respect preferences for face to face care unless there are good clinical reasons to the contrary**, for example the presence of COVID symptoms. If proceeding remotely, the clinician should be confident that it will not have a negative impact on their ability to carry out the consultation effectively. The RCGP has published guidance on '[Remote versus face-to-face: which to use and when?](#)'. We are asking CCGs to prioritise support to practices who are reporting very low levels of face to face appointments.
- **All practice receptions should be open to patients**, adhering to social distancing and IPC guidance. This is important for ensuring that patients who do not have easy access to phones or other devices are not disadvantaged in their ability to access care. Receptions will not yet feel like they did prepandemic – for example where space is very constrained patients may be asked to queue outside. Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms or who meet criteria for self-isolation should continue to follow public health guidance. Posters providing information about the symptoms of

coronavirus and to direct patients that have symptoms or a positive test result in the last 10 days not to enter the building are available on the [Public Health England Campaign Resources Centre website](#).

- **Patients should be treated consistently regardless of mode of access.** Ideally, a patient attending the practice reception should be triaged on the same basis as they would be via phone or via an online consultation system.
- Practices should continue to engage with their practice population regarding access models and should actively adapt their processes as appropriate in response to feedback.

Thank you for your continued hard work and for your ongoing commitment to continuing to deliver the highest quality general practice services.

Dr Nikki Kanani, Medical Director for Primary Care

Ed Waller, Director of Primary Care

[Governments shelter behind the international rule based system](#)

The first law of government is that it continuously expands. This is buttressed by the fourth law, that governments use the international rules based order to bind themselves into aims and policies which they place outside democratic control.

Some think governments undertake the international rules based approach to satisfy the vanity of rulers. They like to perform on the world stage, and are happy to sign grand undertakings to show their collective importance. There is more to it than that. International rules and commitments built into Treaties strengthen the powers of unelected officials and advisers, and reduce the number of areas that elected politicians can in future change. Officials negotiate much of the detail and pre-empt future choices and options for Ministers and new governments.

In its most developed form, EU membership, incoming elected governments have so much less scope to change and improve things than in non EU countries. They inherit a vast amount of EU law which remains as a given with no EU level impulse to repeal or reduce. As Euro members they inherit an economic policy largely determined outside their state, with interest rates, budget deficits and other matters settled or controlled from the EU centre. The EU requirements are enforced through an EU controlled court with the power to fine, to withhold access to EU money and to impose other sanctions. It greatly reduces what elections can alter.

Some of these international bodies allow independence of thought and action. NATO, for example, leaves members free to decide whether to join a NATO mission or not in any given case. The WTO is a series of rules for freer trade with a dispute settlement procedure, where any penalties have to be proportionate to the infringement and of the same kind. The international Treaty obligations around climate change are mainly enforced through moral and political pressures. Increasingly the Climate Change framework does preempt policy and decisions in a wide range of governmental areas from energy and industrial policy through transport to agriculture.

The international rules based system has two main weaknesses. The first is that the alternative world view held by China, Russia, Iran and their allies allows them to behave in very different ways and sometimes to find and exploit weaknesses in the West's approach. The open statement and predictability of the West's approach is seen as a weakness. The second is how the rules are applied by an elite of well paid unelected officials acting as legislators and enforcers can cause a rift between a majority of the electors and what government is doing and saying. The more Treaty commitments a country makes the less power electors wield to demand change. The most important clause in a Treaty which dictates policies and laws to us is the exit clause.

[My speech in response to the Queen's Speech](#)

I begin by saying how much I agree with our colleagues from Northern Ireland who rightly want Northern Ireland to be as fully part of our internal market as it always has been and as the Northern Ireland protocol says it should be.

I urge the Government, with our Northern Ireland colleagues, to urgently negotiate a solution with the EU so that we can have full access to and from Northern Ireland for normal commerce, or, if the EU is determined not to allow that to happen, to take the administrative steps necessary to make sure that our internal market works smoothly and argue the case that the Northern Ireland protocol states that that is part of its objective and so should be enforced.

I welcome many things in the Gracious Speech. I am glad that the Government give great priority to providing the resources to support the innovations and new ideas in the health service. The health service needs to build itself back on all the non-covid-19 treatments and procedures after its valiant fight against this awful illness, and it will take those extra resources that the Government are promising.

There are innovations in the way that healthcare can be delivered, treatment offered and investigations undertaken following the covid-19 period that I am

sure our Secretary of State will be very keen to ensure the NHS works up professionally to make a better service.

However, I urge the Government to address a series of problems that seem to be cropping up in various parts of the country relating to some surgeries that are not up to the standards of the best or the good regarding access to healthcare and appointments.

I think everybody wants the reassurance that as the NHS gets back to a better balance in its working, everyone who feels they need an appointment can get through on the phone or on the internet and have early triage and early settlement in a suitable online or face-to-face appointment, depending on their needs.

We are hearing about cases at some surgeries around the country where people cannot get through, where the phone lines are restricted, where the timing of the phone calls is limited, or where there are not enough appointments on offer and no forward booking. I hope that there can be guidelines on minimum standards so that people everywhere feel that they have access to excellent NHS care just as most people do who have good surgeries and good doctors.

I welcome the animal welfare measures in the proposals. One of benefits of making more of our own decisions is that we can and should set higher welfare standards, and I am glad that the Government are taking that up.

I welcome the wish to do more for veterans, and we must ensure that the covenant is properly legislated for. I hope the Government will consider the whole issue of housing, because one unsatisfactory feature of some service careers and lives is that when people leave after many years of good service, they have no deposit for a house and there is no availability of one, because they have been living in service-provided accommodation for many years.

I hope the Government will consider more imaginative schemes that either support service personnel to buy a home of their own while still in the services, or help them with savings and the necessary arrangements to get the right combination of deposit and mortgage when they leave after many years of good service. We want our veterans to be better housed, and not to fall through the cracks because of the service they have given and their dependence on state-provided accommodation that lasts only as long as their service.

I hope the Government will take a stronger line on defending our fish and restoring our fishing industry. We must do lots of work before the so-called transition is over. Many Brexit voters look to the Government to provide that back-up to our fishing industry, and to ensure proper standards, regulation and control of our fishing grounds, and that our own industry is properly looked after.

I also hope we will soon get some VAT reductions or cancellations. VAT was imposed on a range of items that, if left to its own devices, the UK Parliament probably would not have chosen. That should be part of the Brexit bonus.

I hope the Government will work more, as the Gracious Speech implied, on national resilience. That issue is becoming common—indeed, President Biden is working hard on that in the United States of America. We have seen how, if we become too dependent on overseas interests, we must be careful in the field of energy. We have seen our French neighbours threatening Jersey over the energy supply that it currently receives from an interconnector to France.

I hope the Government will learn a lesson from that. Interconnectors under the sea are vulnerable if other countries are hostile to us, because of the physical location of the cable. We should move our policy from one of increasing dependence on more interconnectors to import energy, to one of wanting self-sufficiency and capacity in the United Kingdom. We always used to have that, and surely it would be a good source of jobs and investment if we set ourselves the target of getting back to meeting our own needs in whatever suitable style the Government wish.

I am glad the Government are talking about broadband and threats to the internet. We must ensure that, with the right amount of Government support and a great deal of private-led investment, we get fast broadband throughout the country, for both business and home use, as that is a big part of our future.

We saw how dependent we have become on broadband as we made special arrangements for the pandemic, and many of those changes will live on in whole or in part. We therefore need that much better capacity and performance. The national resilience strategy must ensure some of the building blocks. Indeed, we literally need more building blocks, basic materials and capacity for the construction industry, but we must also produce enough of things such as steel and aluminium to have that resilience should problems emerge in the world's supply system.

I am pleased that the Government will consider public procurement. Now that we are free to make more of our own decisions, it is right to review the huge sums of money that the Government spend on buying in goods and services, and ask ourselves whether, while preserving sensible competitive process, we can ensure that more of that money is well spent on United Kingdom supply. In some areas I feel that we resort too easily to the overseas option, and at a time when other great countries around the world are taking steps to ensure more of their own internal capacity, the United Kingdom must do that as well.

Building back better should be about making sure, with that right mixture of public demand—perhaps sometimes with public pump-priming, but more often with a lot of private investment—that we start to replace some of that lost capacity and substitute for some of those imports, because our balance of payments deficit is still very large.

I was very interested to see a quote from the Labour deputy leader, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), in recent days, where she said:

“Working-class people don't want a handout or someone telling us what we should think. We want the opportunities to do it for ourselves.”

I think those are a great couple of sentences. In a way, the Government have got there first, and quite a few of the things that the Government are saying and some of the things that the Government are doing in this Gracious Speech are about just that.

Levelling up is not about making people more dependent on the state throughout the country with a sort of competitive bidding process to see who can get the most money from the state; it is about spending state money intelligently and making state interventions intelligently where only the state can go in areas such as transport and support for those in difficulty, while at the same time generating many more good private sector jobs, allowing many more businesses to flourish and allowing many more people to gain skills and trade for themselves. Through that we can have a more diverse, more private sector-led economy in the areas of the country that have not been as prosperous or have had higher unemployment than we would like.

I welcome everything in the Queen's Speech, which promotes a great recovery and offers many more hand-ups for people, so that they do not need so many handouts. We need to have that active promotion of success and ensure that people feel they have opportunities. We have to make sure that companies feel they have opportunities, that there will be more better-paid jobs, that we help people who wish to train for them and that training is available so that people can go on that journey from a less well paid job to a better-paid job.

Above all, we need more measures—tax and otherwise—to help people expand their own small businesses or to see that self-employment is a good option that might give them a better life and a higher income. We do that by lower taxes, by smarter regulations and by a Government who spend their money on buying great UK products and services and allow some of that spending to filter into small companies, as well as into the usual large companies that provide so much of the public procurement that is domestically provided.

I welcome the Queen's Speech. I want to see a rapid and strong recovery. I want a recovery that is all about many more better-paid jobs, harnessing a lot more private investment, expanding our industrial and service provision capacity and widening people's boundaries and opportunities.

I trust that our freeports, when they come, will have wide boundaries and a very generous offer, because they could be some of the pioneers of the enterprise spirit we will need in the places that we wish to level up. I wish to see the right repairs and improvements to the public estate, so that it is something of which we are proud. That goes alongside the levelling up, which will entail a lot of private investment and private job creation.

That surely is the future. By all means level up; let us do it by promoting great investment and by having excellence in the public sector, where only the public sector can operate.

The government sets out its action plan for better animal welfare

ACTION PLAN FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

What are we doing?

We are a nation of animal lovers. The UK was the first country in the world to pass legislation to protect animals in 1822, and we have achieved remarkable things in this area ever since. However, we want to go further, setting new higher ambitions which continue the tradition of protecting animals in the UK and abroad.

Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare sets out Government's plans on animal welfare for this Parliament and beyond. The document provides a high-level overview of over forty policy reforms we intend to tackle across five different workstreams, outlined below with our key proposals pulled out:

- Sentience and Enforcement

Our landmark Sentience Bill will recognise and enshrine animal sentience in law, and will create an expert committee on animal sentience to report on government decisions, holding Ministers accountable to Parliament for animal welfare in policy making, in a targeted and proportionate way. In addition we will support more legislation to improve enforcement – such as the use of penalty notices.

- International Trade and Advocacy

We will ensure our high animal welfare standards are not compromised in our trade negotiations and we will use our position as a global leader for international advocacy on animal welfare. Legislation will be introduced to ban the import of hunting trophies from endangered animals broad, to ban the import and export of detached shark fins, and to stop the advertising and sale here of unacceptable animal attractions abroad. We will explore next steps on the fur and foie gras trades and implement the Ivory Act.

- Farm Animals

As part of protecting and enhancing the welfare of farm animals we will end the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening. Our upcoming consultation on food labelling will consider reforms to make it easier for consumers to purchase food that aligns with their welfare values. We will support livestock farmers financially via our 'Animal Health and Welfare Pathway'. Further reforms in this area include introducing effective powers to tackle 'livestock worrying' and considering other improvements to welfare on the farm, such as examining the use of cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for pigs.

- Pets and Sporting Animals

We will bring forward legislation to tackle the trade in puppy smuggling and introduce compulsory cat microchipping. Our cross-Government taskforce will crack down on pet theft and we will also take forward wider reforms such as

the licensing of animal sanctuaries, as well as consider improvements for racing greyhounds and for equine identification.

- Wild Animals

Keeping primates as pets will be prohibited by law, and we will consider further legislation for a close season for hares whilst cracking down on the illegal practice of hare coursing. We will improve standards for zoos, including in relation to their conservation activities. We will also consider restricting the use of glue traps for pest control and bringing forward measures to tackle wildlife crime.

Why now?

The coronavirus outbreak has underlined the importance of animals in our lives. From the overwhelming companionship provided by our pets, to the importance of a secure food supply chain founded upon high-welfare farming, to conserving and protecting wild animals, animal welfare has never been more important.

Now we have left the EU and our Transition Period has ended we have the opportunity to go further than ever in protecting our animals. In areas that were previously under the jurisdiction of EU law we can now more freely make our own reforms and fulfil our manifesto commitments on animal welfare.

What are the next steps?

To enact these plans the Government has an ambitious programme of legislation in the upcoming session, including the Animal Welfare (Sentience), Kept Animals, and Animals Abroad Bills, which will deliver all of the Government's manifesto commitments on animal welfare. All non-legislative work will be progressed in parallel. Legislation on many of the policy areas referenced in these plans will be introduced in the coming months. Where we have committed to gather further evidence ahead of introducing any changes we will work closely with stakeholders and the public on this.

For more information on the Action Plan for Animal Welfare please contact animals.bill@defra.gov.uk

End of HMG document

Those of you who have written to me with views on meat labelling should write in to the address above with your views as the government is looking at changes.

[EU lose out on UK imports to rest of world](#)

The first quarter trade figures for the UK show a sharp decline in the trade deficit, Much of this relates to higher stock levels last year which needed

using up. The figures also show, however, some shift in our pattern of imports, bringing in less from the EU and more from the rest of the world. This probably reflects the aggressive and unhelpful stance of the EU over trade matters.

If we compare the month of March 2021 with March 2019 before the pandemic disrupted economies and trade we see a £1.3bn fall in imports of EU miscellaneous manufactures, a £2.8bn fall in imports of EU machinery and transport items, a £0.4bn fall in EU food and a £2bn fall in EU chemicals. In contrast the same period sees a rise of £0.2bn in rest of the world imported miscellaneous manufactures, a much smaller £0.5bn fall in rest of the world machinery and transport, a £0.1bn increase in rest of the world food and a £0.6bn increase in rest of the world chemical imports. It is always a better idea to be helpful to customers, as the rest of the world is demonstrating.