

UK Statement to the WTO General Council

Thank you, Chair, and thank you Director General, for your opening remarks.

In line with others, I want to thank you, on behalf of the United Kingdom, for calling this meeting on the multilateral trade response, to the most serious global challenge in a generation, one that is also transforming the global trading system, and as the WTO's own analysis shows, risks seriously undermining it.

But first, I would like to recall my statement at the Heads of Delegation meeting yesterday, conveying the United Kingdom's warmest wishes to Director General Azevedo, upon the announcement of his stepping down, and thanking him for all he has done – and will continue to do – throughout his term. The United Kingdom heeds the DG's call for Members to move quickly to appoint a successor, and stands ready to support Ambassador David Walker with the next steps in the process.

Now, let me turn to today's discussion on the Covid-19 crisis.

This is a global crisis. This pandemic is already the worst international health crisis for a century. By the time it is finished, it risks also becoming the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and a global social and political crisis into the bargain.

The multilateral system has a critical role to play in mitigating this worst case scenario, and, to coin a phrase, bending the curve of this crisis below the ability of the global political and economic system to cope. Geneva has already responded well, and after a difficult negotiation, the World Health Assembly will adopt an important resolution on Monday, to guide us through the next phase of the pandemic, and ensure we learn and adapt as we go forward.

The WTO also has a major role to play. While we understand the challenges for the organisation in meeting formally, it is still the world's leading platform for discussing global trade, with senior trade representatives from around the world. It is the place where the impact on COVID-19 on the global trading system should be discussed, where ideas and solutions should be shared, and where initiatives to mitigate the global economic crisis to come, launched.

In that spirit, the UK welcomes today's meeting of the General Council, and looks forward to much more debate in the future.

Now, let me turn to the WTO response more specifically.

So far, the Secretariat has proactively collated information and published useful analytical pieces. In support of that effort, the United Kingdom has provided relevant information, including regularly contributing to the Covid

specific surveillance platform hosted on the WTO webpage and submitting a return to the Director General for the Trade Monitoring Report.

The United Kingdom would welcome more frequent Trade Monitoring reports – for example, returning to the quarterly reports during the financial crisis. We agree with Switzerland that there is much more that the WTO and its Members can do. The WTO needs to be the place where the trade restricting measures that have been introduced in response to COVID-19 are reported, their consequences debated, and our collective determination to resist serious damage they could do to the global economy expressed.

The UK also welcomes the fact that Members have started to coordinate responses to Covid, informally through the WTO, as well as through other groupings like the G20.

So, together with a range of other WTO Members, the United Kingdom has cosponsored statements on key issues.

For example, we believe in the importance of keeping global agricultural supply chains open, especially given the relatively high levels of food stocks and production we see globally, so signed the statement led by our Canadian colleagues. We welcome the idea of holding a dedicated meeting in June to discuss this.

We were also pleased to support the Swiss-led statement in support of the multilateral trading system, and the statement in support of MSMEs led by our Uruguayan, Canadian and Mexican colleagues.

As this crisis evolves, we will continue to work with Members on appropriate initiatives supporting free, fair and inclusive rules-based trade. We will also seek to advance this agenda elsewhere, and like the DG, we welcome the the outcomes agreed at the virtual extraordinary G20 Trade Ministers' meeting yesterday.

We are keenly aware that many developing country partners, as well as small island states and other vulnerable economies, are experiencing a serious period of trade shock, as currency depreciations combine with sharp declines in important export sectors like tourism. This potentially jeopardises decades of hard-fought, trade-led prosperity.

Today I'd like to announce that, through the UK's Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund and our funding to the World Bank, we are providing support to eligible developing country Members to better understand the trade-related impacts of COVID-19 on their economies, notify COVID-related measures to the WTO's monitoring exercise, and tackle the COVID crisis through better trade facilitation.

Lastly, Chair, let me turn to the importance of continuing with regular business.

It is important that this crisis does not set back the important work that the WTO has been tasked with. Beyond ensuring the reinstatement of a fully functioning dispute resolution system, and continuing the crucial regular

monitoring and transparency work, we need to continue to work on live negotiations.

These negotiations – including on fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, MSMEs, domestic regulation in services and investment facilitation for development – are a critical part of a broader discussion on how this institution should better meet the needs of 21st century business and society.

Thank you Chair.

[Learning at Work Week in ODP](#)

News story

Colleagues in the Operational Delivery Profession (ODP) take part in yearly campaign to celebrate learning opportunities at work.



Learning at Work Week is an annual event run each May which has been organised by the Campaign for Learning since 1999 and aims to put a spotlight on the importance and benefits of learning and development at work.

This year sees a significant change, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the main campaign has been moved and will take place from 05 to 11 October. However, a smaller campaign will still run from 18 – 24 May focusing on the theme of 'On Air, Online'.

Recognising that many people are working in different roles, re-training and adapting to different and sometimes stressful situations, we aim to signpost to some relevant learning during this time.

Although your department may not be in a position to develop opportunities and activities during this particular campaign, we hope that our communications programme will help you to engage with our offer and still keep an eye on your development during this difficult time.

No matter where you are working at the moment, it's vital to keep connecting

with your ODP community and we are here to support you with that. We've seen some fantastic collaborative working already so let's build on that and celebrate what makes ODP so special.

Each day next week we will be posting some inspirational learning on our social media channels, ranging from digital upskilling to wellbeing hints and tips, plus we'll be featuring a fantastic daily calendar from our Home Office colleagues.

If you don't already follow us, make sure to take a look at our Twitter account here [ODP on Twitter](#) or if you prefer Facebook, join us here [ODP on Facebook](#) and make sure you don't miss a thing.

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[Charity watchdog opens inquiry into Islamic Research Foundation International](#)

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry into the [Islamic Research Foundation International](#) (registered charity number 1122086) to examine continued concerns about the administration of the charity.

The charity's objects include the advancement of the Islamic faith, and it delivers on these aims by securing donations for the Peace TV network (Peace TV and Peace TV Urdu), which broadcasts religious content.

The Commission previously engaged with the charity in 2016 and 2019 over concerns raised about the charity's governance. This included concerns over the charity's decision-making in relation to its funding of Peace TV. In November 2019, Ofcom moved to suspend Peace TV Urdu's licence – and both its licence and that of Peace TV were surrendered and consequently they are no longer broadcasting in the UK.

On 17 April 2020 the Commission opened an inquiry to examine:

- the trustees' decision making about continuing to fund the Peace TV channels despite several breaches of Ofcom's Broadcasting Code
- the trustees' willingness and ability to appropriately adapt following the aforesaid serious issues arising from the charity funding Peace TV channels
- whether there are conflicts of interest and/or loyalty arising from an overlap between some of the charity's trustees and the Peace TV licensee's directors

- the charity's application of restricted funds and the trustees' plans for funds already raised but not yet passed over to the Peace TV channels
- whether all funds that the charity granted to fund the Peace TV channels have been used to carry out activities that exclusively furthered a charitable purpose
- whether the charity's resources and/or activities have furthered non-charitable purposes and/or resulted in the trustees receiving unauthorised personal benefits

The Commission may extend the scope of the inquiry if additional regulatory issues emerge.

The Commission has not made any conclusions and the opening of the inquiry is not a finding of wrongdoing.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Ends

Notes to editors

- The charity was not itself a licence holder for Peace TV or Peace TV Urdu; these were held by third parties.

Secure video calls to help prisoners maintain family ties

- HMP Berwyn and HMYOI Wetherby among first 10 to benefit
- All calls recorded and restricted to 4 callers

Secure video calls will be introduced to prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) across England and Wales to maintain vital family contact for prisoners and young offenders during the coronavirus pandemic.

Following a successful trial at HMP Berwyn, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is installing the technology at 10 institutions with a wider rollout in the coming weeks.

The measure is part of wider action to preserve family ties after social visits in prisons and YOIs were suspended, to comply with the government's guidance on controlling the spread of coronavirus and protecting life.

The new technology builds on the [2017 Lord Farmer review](#) which found that close bonds between prisoners and family members can significantly reduce their risk of reoffending.

Safeguards are in place to prevent misuse with all participants vetted in advance and calls monitored by prison staff. The calls will be time-limited and restrictions have been built into the software to ensure safe use.

Prisons and Probation Minister Lucy Frazer QC MP, said:

Prisoners have seen drastic changes to their daily routines to protect local health services and save lives.

A part of that has been the loss of social visits – something we know plays a huge role in prisoners' wellbeing and rehabilitation.

It is therefore right that we take proportionate steps to keep them in touch with their families by other means during the current pandemic.

Nick Leader, Governor of HMP Berwyn, which is one of the first jails to benefit from the use family video calls, said:

The introduction of video calls has shown that even in times of adversity it is possible to develop new and innovative ways of supporting those in our care.

This technology will support resettlement planning and is a positive step to improve relations with staff and reduce the strain introduced by some of the current, but necessary, restrictions.

The introduction of video calls reflects the government's recognition of the importance of maintaining family ties, particularly at women's prisons, young offender institutions and jails without in-cell telephones. In March, ministers acted quickly to introduce [900 secure phone handsets](#) which have been rolled out across the prison estate.

The first institutions to begin video calls are: HMPs Berwyn, Bronzefield, Downview, Eastwood Park, Garth, High Down, Hull, Wayland, Werrington and Wetherby. In line with recommendations from the Lord Farmer review, work was already underway to explore the use of video calls, and we are assessing their potential wider use in future.

Video calls will be provided through secure laptops in a designated room in each institution. Time-limited calls will be made either by prisoners making a call request to their designated contact or by families who can request a time slot through a mobile app or directly with the establishment.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the government has already taken

unprecedented action, including the [temporary release of risk-assessed prisoners](#) within two months of their release date and the [installation of hundreds of temporary accommodation units](#) across the estate.

[Modelling from Public Health England](#) suggests the measures are showing early signs of effectiveness, with a reduction in the rate of infection in prisons.

Civil news: mandatory telephone gateway phased out

Clients can now choose a greater number of providers to help with education, discrimination and debt issues under changes introduced on 15 May 2020.

This will allow people requiring help and support with education, discrimination and debt cases to contact face-to-face providers directly.

It means we need to make contractual and operational changes to the way we work to bring us in line with the new civil legal aid rules.

The new rules have been introduced through changes to the Civil Legal Aid Procedure Regulations. These regulations also make a number of other changes to civil legal aid procedures.

Mandatory telephone gateway removed

It is no longer mandatory for people to use the telephone gateway to access services in the education, discrimination and debt categories of law. This requirement has been removed from legislation.

We began the phased removal of the gateway in September 2019 when new face-to-face contracts were introduced for education and discrimination work. However, clients still had to apply for legal aid via the gateway.

These further changes mean clients in all three categories of law will now have a choice of accessing advice directly from a face-to-face provider or by the telephone gateway.

Changes to contracts and systems

A number of changes have been made to Legal Aid Agency systems, contracts, forms and guidance to reflect the removal of the gateway.

This includes changes to:

- Lord Chancellor's guidance

- CW1 application form
- Guidance on the CLA Service
- Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme guidance

The new CW1 application form is now available on GOV.UK. Previous versions of this form will continue to be accepted in the coming weeks so that providers have time to adjust. But we would prefer you to use the new version where possible.

We will also be writing to all face-to-face housing and debt providers to increase the allocation of debt matter starts they hold. It is changing from 4 new matter starts to 10 new matter starts.

Mediation application form changes

This change means people making use of mediation services can now sign the application form remotely and send it back to the mediator.

This is instead of having to sign the form in the mediator's presence. The new rules mirror current provisions for legal help applications. Revisions have been made to the family mediation specification to reflect this change.

Mediators should be aware of the contingency guidance the LAA has in place as part of our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

This guidance contains information on the approach we are currently taking to all applications for legal aid, including applications for mediation under the new rules. This includes, for example, guidance on the use of digital signatures and remote attendance during the pandemic.

The contingency guidance can be found here:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Legal Aid Agency contingency response](#)

Domestic violence evidence requirements

Changes have been made to the evidence requirements that need to be satisfied in order to qualify for legal aid as a victim of domestic abuse.

Revisions have been made to our guidance on evidence requirements as a result.

Backdating of means waiver for inquests

A discretion has been introduced allowing us to backdate legal help in inquest cases. This can be done in circumstances where we decide that the usual means thresholds should be waived.

We will be updating the exceptional case funding provider information pack

for inquests to give you further information about this discretion.

Further information

[Legal aid guidance](#) – resources include [Lord Chancellor's guidance \(under section 4 of LASPO\)](#)

[Controlled work application forms](#)

[Standard Civil Contracts 2018](#)

[Standard Civil Contract \(Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme\) 2013](#)

[Housing Possession Court Duty Schemes](#)