

It's a national effort to win coronavirus fight, we all have crucial part to play

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As a country we are in the fortunate position of being home to an extraordinary wealth of experts – scientists, researchers and academics – all at the forefront of their chosen fields.

These are people who have dedicated their whole lives to studying, researching, and honing their knowledge in their chosen area of expertise, including in vaccines and pandemics; knowledge that is now being applied to tackling COVID-19.

Now, as we collectively face down a global pandemic, we need these experts more than ever. And we need their voices, and their advice, to be full, frank and honest – our approach to this virus will always be guided by the scientific evidence.

Of course, every virus is different. But what we do know is that epidemics are like a pole vaulter taking flight: the outbreak starts slowly, takes off rapidly, reaches a peak and then comes back down to earth. Right now, we need to flatten that peak.

We have now entered the delay phase of this pandemic and we want to delay the spread and reduce its efforts. This is response to the current spread of the disease in the UK that reflects the fact that we are few weeks some countries in terms of the outbreak of the disease.

By taking steps to squash the peak, we will be better able to look after the NHS and put it in a stronger position to respond in the months to come – and make sure it is better equipped to offer better care to those people for whom this disease has more chance of being fatal.

We all have a crucial part to play. This is a mild disease in most people. But it is paramount that we do everything possible to protect ourselves, to protect others, and protect the NHS.

This means heeding the health advice and using common sense. If you have even mild symptoms of coronavirus infection – including a new continuous cough and or a high temperature – then you [stay at home](#) and don't leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started.

For people without symptoms we have 4 simple words of advice:

Keep. Washing. Your. Hands.

Wash them often, wash them even when wouldn't you normally wash them, and wash them with soap for 20 seconds at a time.

I've opted for Prince's, Raspberry Beret as my own personal handwash song. You can choose your own.

The situation that the Prime Minister, the Chief Medical Officer and I outlined last week is a sobering one.

I am certain many people will be understandably worried and anxious, because these are not normal times. COVID-19 is a new virus that we don't have immunity against, and we don't yet have a vaccine for.

Since the very first cases were reported in China in January, the science and medical community have been united in a common purpose: protecting lives by providing evidence-based advice to elected leaders on when we should act, how we should act and why we should act.

This is going to be a national effort. Together, we all need to be brave enough to stay calm, act rationally and follow the science. We will need to take care not to spread the disease and take care of each other.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency receives £1.4 billion budget boost for world-leading Weybridge Laboratory

The UK's world-leading scientific and veterinary capability will be enhanced after a £1.4 billion investment boost to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to protect the country against the increasing threats of animal and plant diseases.

The new funding, announced by the Chancellor in the [Budget](#) on Wednesday 11 March, will be used to redevelop and future-proof the current Weybridge facility, a unique site with specialist research and laboratory facilities and capabilities for animal health science and disease control. The money will ensure the UK continues to be a world-leading science capability and safeguard the agency's role in fighting current and emerging animal and plant diseases.

The APHA is responsible for safeguarding animal and plant health for the benefit of the people, the environment and the economy. This has included providing scientific evidence and advice to government in controlling outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001, testing several thousand samples for Avian Influenza (bird flu) during outbreaks in the winter of 2016/17 and recent research that has paved the way for field trials of a cattle vaccine

to combat bovine tuberculosis (bTB). APHA is currently supporting PHE in the government's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

This investment will help the UK economy by protecting against animal and human disease risks. The UK currently exports £4.2bn of livestock, meat and meat products, dairy and animal by-products per year. These exports are safeguarded by the services that APHA provides and the investment will enhance the UK's international reputation as a safe trading partner in the food and farming sectors, supercharging the opportunities for global trade. This investment will also attract high-quality scientists and technical experts, making it an even more attractive place to work.

Christine Middlemiss, UK Chief Veterinary Officer said:

It is great to see that the UK's science capability is being recognised and invested in even further by the government.

The UK is already a global leader in animal health science and we have some of the best scientists in the world. This investment will safeguard and amplify our ability to collaborate and influence globally .

Lord Gardiner, Defra Biosecurity Minister said:

This new Government investment reflects APHA's world leading reputation and essential role at the heart of UK science, disease prevention, and rapid response to disease outbreaks. I am delighted as this funding will help ensure the UK continues to be a leading voice globally on science and biosecurity".

Chris Hadkiss, Chief Executive of APHA said:

This is fantastic news for everyone at APHA and the wider Defra group as this gives the financial investment to ensure we can continue to enhance our crucial and valuable role in animal health science and in providing our emergency response to disease outbreaks.

The financial commitment also highlights how the government recognises our international reputation as experts in animal and plant health science and the critical role we have in protecting the UK and the economy from animal disease risk.

APHA Weybridge provides expert advice to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the World Health Organisation, as the international reference laboratory for a large range of animal diseases.

[Peter Lauener appointed Chair of the Student Loans Company](#)

The Department for Education has today confirmed that Peter Lauener has been appointed as Chair of the Student Loans Company (SLC), taking over the role from Professor Andrew Wathey, who has held the position on an interim basis since 1 February 2020. Professor Wathey replaced Christian Brodie, who served as Chair for six years from January 2014.

Peter is currently Chair of the Construction Industry Training Board, Chair of Newcastle Colleague Group (NCG) and a Non-executive director at Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust. He has previously held the roles of Chief Executive Officer, Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) and Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Apprenticeships (IFA). He was previously interim Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company between November 2017 and September 2018.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said: "I am pleased to welcome Peter as the new Chair of the Student Loans Company. His knowledge and experience of the sector means he is well placed to lead the organisation as it continues to provide its important services for students and graduates."

Peter Lauener said: "I am delighted to once again support the Student Loans Company, this time as Chair of the organisation. SLC plays a vital role in enabling almost 2 million students each year to invest in their futures through higher and further education by providing trusted, transparent, and accessible student finance services.

"I am particularly looking forward to reacquainting myself with colleagues from across the organisation, whose dedication to their roles enables SLC to deliver finance services for students, graduates and higher and further education institutions.

Paula Sussex, SLC Chief Executive said: "I am thrilled to be welcoming Peter back to the organisation as we work to fulfil our vision to be widely recognised as enabling student opportunity and delivering an outstanding service to our customers".

[Children set example for danger](#)

drivers in safer roadworks competition

Highways England is improving Norcross roundabout along the A585 in Lancashire. It had already enlisted ten local primary schools to design the safety signs before a spate of driving-through-roadworks incidents at the site. Similar incidents had also occurred at another congestion relief project at junction 3 of the M55.

The winners of the poster competition have now been unveiled with Stanah and Sacred Heart primary schools, both in Thornton-Cleveleys, scooping the two prizes – a chance to visit the site and see full-size versions of their signs on display next week.

More than 200 Highways England staff – many of them roadworkers – from across the North West voted for their favourite designs. There were two themes in the competition with Stanah winning the ‘Please drive safely’ competition and Sacred Heart the other with its ‘Thank you for driving safely’ design.

All ten of the schools taking part in the competition have been rewarded with vouchers, construction-themed goody bags for the children and have also taken delivery of full-size versions of their entries. The competition was sponsored by construction firm Carnell which is the lead contractor on the Norcross roundabout project.

Highways England senior project manager Steve Mason said:

It’s fair to say we got a brilliant response from children at every one of the ten schools involved and who would win the competition was anyone’s guess as the entries were all fantastic.

The competition was very timely as we did have issues at the beginning of the project with a small minority of drivers cutting through roadworks and jumping temporary traffic lights with little regard for their own or our road workers’ safety.

Highways England’s Lucy Gurney, who organised the competition in partnership with Carnell, said:

The competition was designed to help promote safer driving generally but especially around road workers. Getting local school children involved enabled the message to be taken home to families and friends – some of the schools set the competition as homework – and helps encourage a generation of future drivers to think ‘safety first’.

The competition was linked to the schools’ Key Stage 2 curriculum work.

Hamish Clough, head teacher of Stanah, said:

We are delighted that one of our pupils has won the competition. The prize money will enable us to buy some new play equipment for our children to use at break times.

A visit to the site is exciting for our children as they will learn how the new road has been planned and constructed. They will also have opportunity to discuss the roles and responsibilities of staff on the site. It will help enrich their Summer term topic on our locality and its development.

The Norcross project has had a dedicated safety van on site to record incidents of drivers breaching roadworks. In response to the incidents, Highways England adjusted its construction plans and closed access off the A585 during overnight work.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Magazine and tech sites merger to be cleared if concerns overcome](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating Future's proposed £140 million takeover of TI Media.

Future is a multi-platform media company that publishes specialist magazines in digital and print formats. TI Media is another leading specialist digital and print magazine publisher. The deal would create one of Europe's largest magazine businesses, covering many well-known brands such as What's on TV, Marie Claire, Country Life and Wallpaper*. As there is limited overlap between the two businesses at present, the CMA's assessment primarily focussed on a small number of markets where the two businesses currently compete with each other.

After completing its initial Phase 1 investigation, the CMA found that the 2 businesses compete closely in photography and football magazines and

technology websites. Future owns titles such as the market leading FourFourTwo and Digital Camera, as well as technology websites such as Techradar.com and T3.com. TI Media owns popular titles such as WorldSoccer and Amateur Photographer, and also owns the technology website, Trustedreviews.com. The 2 businesses would, together, hold a very strong position in these markets after the merger, with few alternatives for customers and advertisers.

The CMA is therefore concerned that customers who read football or photography magazines, or who use or advertise on technology websites, could face higher prices or lower quality products.

Colin Raftery, CMA Senior Director of Mergers, said:

“Online content is having a major impact on the publishing industry, but specialist magazines still sell millions of copies each year and are highly valued by their readers because of the breadth and quality of their content.

“If Future were to hold all of these titles, there’s a real risk that these readers of football and photography magazines could end up paying more for lower quality products because of the lack of choice in the market.”

Future and TI Media must now address the CMA’s concerns within 5 working days. If they’re unable to do so, the merger will be referred for an in-depth (Phase 2) investigation.

For more information, visit the [Future Plc / TI Media Limited merger inquiry web page](#).

For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.