

Getting out of the furlough

The government yesterday confirmed there would be no abrupt end to the furlough scheme to help pay to keep workforces together and ready to return to work. The Chancellor also accepted the advice of many of us that it needs to be more flexible, allowing part time work for the employer by some of those in furlough with appropriate reductions in financial support.

We await the details of the extended scheme, which could last until October. It is important to help businesses keep a workforce together who are banned from working by law. Such a business needs a grant, not a loan, as it cannot help itself by earning revenue. This money can be borrowed by the state, with the burden spread over many years ahead. Clearly there are limits to how long this can go on, as the state cannot borrow for a long period to keep a workforce together that is not allowed to earn its own income. It is now equally important that there is a path back to work for these enterprises.

There will be hard cases. Where businesses that were viable in areas like hospitality face delay before they can resume working, the risks of eventual redundancies are higher. Where this is compounded by those businesses expecting to have to operate at much reduced levels of sales owing to the social distancing rules, they may end up with a business which cannot pay its way let alone make a profit. It is difficult to know how many cafes, restaurants, hotels, pubs and clubs will re open with a way of doing business that can pay all the bills. Clearly keeping a 2 metre distance between customers and staff is going to prove very difficult in many of the properties and locations previously used for such activities.

I am glad that some of these businesses have already shown great enterprise and flexibility turning to take away meals, looking at how they can use gardens and other under used spaces to spread customers out and introducing screens or other barriers to allow closer spacing.

None of this is good for the recovery of the High Street. Rents and business rates remain high, when we need adjustments to the new reality of reduced earning power in many places.

Changes to Operations of Schools and Other Education Providers

I have today received this update from the Government:

Dear John

Today I am setting out in more detail how we will support early years, school and further education settings to welcome back more children from 1 June at the earliest, if we are able to do so safely.

You will have seen the Prime Minister's video address on Sunday where he confirmed that we are now past the peak of the virus and he set out a roadmap for careful modifications to social distancing measures. Now that we have made progress in reducing the transmission of coronavirus we anticipate, with further progress, that from the week commencing 1 June at the earliest we may be able to welcome back more children to nurseries, schools and colleges.

We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by Government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the Roadmap are operating effectively. As a result, we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

It is now seven weeks since we closed schools, colleges and childcare settings to all but priority groups – vulnerable children and those of critical workers. This has been a huge ask of teachers, parents and especially of children themselves, and the response has been incredible across the board. But we all know that the best place for children to be is in school and it has always been my intention to get them back there as soon as the scientific advice allows. Children returning to educational and childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more families to return to work.

From the week commencing 1 June at the earliest, I will be asking primary schools to prepare to welcome back children in nursery, Reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside the priority groups currently at school. I will ask secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside the full time provision they are offering to priority groups.

We will also ask nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children from 1 June. Alternative provision settings should mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face contact for years 10 and 11 students (as they have no year 12). Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools should look to achieve an equivalent phased return without a focus on specific year groups.

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if possible, though this will be kept under review. We will only welcome back additional year groups if the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. Keeping children and staff safe is our utmost priority.

Our approach is underpinned by our latest understanding of the science, which

indicates that we need to take a phased approach in order to limit the risk of increasing the rate of transmission above 1. We know that attending early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's social and emotional development.

The three year groups within primary have been prioritised because they are key transition years, and the two year groups in secondary/colleges have been prioritised because they are preparing for key examinations next year. This approach is in line with other countries across Europe, who have begun to bring pre-school and school-age children back in a phased way and are focusing on primary schools and younger children. Approaches between countries will vary slightly based on different public health circumstances.

We are continuing to limit the number of children returning so that settings can reduce the number of people in classrooms compared to usual and put protective measures in place to reduce risks. Children and young people will need to stay within their group wherever possible and we will ask settings to implement a range of protective measures including frequent cleaning, reducing 'pinch points' (such as parents dropping children off at the start and end of the day) and utilising outdoor space.

In early years settings, existing space requirements and staff:child ratios for these age groups should allow for small group working. Staff and children in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their households, and the track and trace approach will be applied to any confirmed cases. Those who are extremely clinically vulnerable, or are living with someone who is, are not expected to attend. Anyone with concerns about underlying health conditions should follow our protective measures guidance.

Public Health England is clear that if settings implement these protective measures, and crucially if they also apply comprehensive infection control measures, such as ensuring symptomatic individuals do not attend settings, regular hand washing, respiratory hygiene and cleaning measures and handling potential cases of the virus as per our advice, then the risk of transmission will be lowered.

I will assess the impact of these changes closely, working with medical and scientific advisers as well as sector leaders. We will provide the sector with further guidance and support to help them to prepare for wider opening over the coming days and weeks. Today we have published the following pieces of guidance:

- Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June;
- Supporting guidance on protective measures which should be implemented in education settings;
- Guidance for parents and carers.

I want to thank the House for supporting schools and other providers in your own constituencies through this incredibly difficult time. I know that I can rely on our education and childcare sectors having the full support of the

House as we prepare for this wider opening.

Our education leaders are central to the country's response to this current crisis. I hope you will join me in thanking all those who work in our education and care settings for their efforts.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education

[Getting about with social distancing](#)

Today we should learn more about how people can get to work given the advice that public transport cannot be used by great numbers to avoid the virus spreading.

I am pressing for more relaxed conditions over parking near to factories and offices for those who live too far away to walk or cycle. The government could offer to help Councils financially if they will waive some parking fees. They should encourage Councils to make more areas available for commuter parking into towns and cities.

The government should also make money available to Councils to make it easier for vans and cars to get into and out of urban areas through a series of measures to increase capacity across junctions and bridges. I have before identified various proposals to optimise traffic lights, segregate right turning traffic from the rest, put in more roundabouts and add to road capacity near and across junctions where the main delays occur.

The economy is relying more and more on van deliveries of on line orders and will now need to let more people get to work by vehicle to allow social distancing from other travellers.

There should also be more discussion of safe working practices in offices and factories where people do need to work outside their homes. This will be based on a combination of greater distancing between people and the provision of protective clothing.

I would be interested in other ideas to make safe working easier for more people, so we can begin to rescue our economy and people's livelihoods from the damage done by the last few weeks of lock down.

Government Financial Support for the Self-Employed and Small Businesses

I have received this answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will increase the Government's financial support for (a) self employed and (b) small businesses during the covid-19 lockdown. (41870)

Tabled on: 01 May 2020

Answer:

Kemi Badenoch:

On April 27 the Government announced the new Bounce Back Loans (BBL) Scheme, which will ensure that the smallest businesses can access loans in a matter of just days. These loans will be from £2,000 up to £50,000, capped at 25% of firms' turnover. The Government will provide lenders with a 100% guarantee on each loan, to give lenders the confidence they need to support the smallest businesses in the country. The Government will cover the first 12 months of interest payments and fees charged to the business by the lender.

Small businesses may also be able to benefit from the new Discretionary Grant Fund announced by the Government on 1 May. The Government has provided up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to enable them to make grants payments to businesses which are facing high fixed property-related costs, but have been excluded from the existing grants schemes because of the way they are treated by the business rates system. Local Authorities are responsible for defining precise eligibility for these funds, and businesses will need to apply to their Local Authority in order to receive grants.

Businesses and self-employed individuals may also benefit from a range of other support measures including:

- The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England
- Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief;
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

The Business Support website provides further information about how

businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the schemes open and how to apply – <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

Controlling our borders

There is understandable impatience by many over the illegal migrants turning up across the Channel after chancing to people traffickers. It is high time the governments on both sides of the Channel clamped down more effectively on this wicked and dangerous trade.

Whilst governments will want to help anyone in peril on the sea, they should also wish to send clear signals to all involved that people trafficking will not profit the organisers and will not gain the objective of the customers. If both parties think they will get what they want out of their rash and dangerous actions, they are likely to continue. If the traffickers deliberately put the customers at risk in an unsuitable boat, forcing rescue by government, it is important that the people trafficker is apprehended and not remunerated. The UK and France need to step up joint action, and France needs to try harder to stop the boats leaving their shore or proceeding far out to sea with the danger that introduces.