

Free PPE for frontline extended for another year

- Move follows public consultation, which received over 5,000 responses from across the health and care system
- Easier way of centrally ordering PPE to be tested by staff

The offer of free Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline health and social care staff in England has been extended for another year.

Supporting frontline workers remains a priority for the government and, following a public consultation, NHS trusts, primary care and adult social care providers will continue to receive COVID-19 PPE free of charge until 31st March 2023 or until infection prevention control (IPC) guidance is withdrawn or significantly amended. This is to ensure staff and their patients are protected.

The government is also developing an improved platform for the procurement of PPE that will be quicker and easier to use. Health and social care providers have been invited to test-drive the new platform and help design a service that works best for them. The new and improved features will enable quick ordering options and status updates.

Free, centrally-procured PPE relieves the financial burden of PPE procurement done on an individual basis, and also enables access to quality PPE of a reliable standard.

Health Minister Edward Argar said:

Throughout the pandemic we have taken swift action to secure the PPE health and social care providers need to ensure staff, patients and residents are protected.

We are extending the offer of free PPE to help relieve pressure on the health and care system, working hand in hand with providers to develop a new ordering platform that works best for them.

A public consultation was launched in October 2021 to determine whether to extend the central, free provision of PPE. Over 5,000 responses were received, from a range of people and organisations, including primary and social care providers, community health care services, and PPE wholesalers and suppliers. 95% of respondents were in favour of extending the offer of free PPE.

Following customer testing and trial launch, the new PPE portal will be rolled out to all eligible users from April.

Notes to editors:

The Consultation Outcome: [Extending free PPE to the health and care sector: government response to public consultation](#)

UK Statement in Response to OSCE Chair in Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, H.E. Mr Zbigniew Rau

Thank you Minister Rau and welcome to Vienna. On behalf of the United Kingdom I would like to congratulate you on Poland's Chairmanship and offer you our full support in the year ahead. We look forward to working with you and your excellent team here in Vienna and in Warsaw over the course of 2022.

Poland is assuming this important leadership position at a critical time for Euro-Atlantic security. An ongoing pandemic, significant challenges to human rights and fundamental freedoms, protracted conflicts and heightened tensions form the backdrop to our security landscape. Above all, the unprovoked and unjustified build-up of Russian forces around Ukraine.

You have set out clearly the task which we have ahead of us. I have said the task we have ahead of us as it is clear that all participating States at the OSCE have an important role to play. We must all defend robustly the principles and commitments to which we freely signed up and which are the bedrock of our shared security. Non use of force, sovereignty, territorial integrity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms – these are ultimately what the OSCE is all about. We need to work together to uphold them and we are ready for meaningful dialogue which must be based on the core principles and foundational documents of European Security.

We support your approach for the OSCE to be used as a platform for discussions on European security. It is an appropriate and inclusive platform. We must defend the principle that there should be no discussions about security without the countries concerned being present. The OSCE brings us together as 57 participating States from North America to Mongolia and from the Arctic Circle down to the Mediterranean, Caucasus and Central Asia. We have shared interests and the OSCE has a firm foundation, including through its range of mechanisms and instruments to address the challenges we face. We believe that we should move forward in a timely fashion in reinvigorating the debate on European security and will be happy to feed in thoughts.

The peaceful settlement of conflicts in Europe will further contribute to stability in Europe. We are determined to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's threatening behaviour. Russia

must uphold the commitments it signed up to freely, namely The Helsinki Final Act and the Minsk Protocols, as well as the Budapest Memorandum, guaranteeing to “respect the independence and sovereignty and the borders of Ukraine”. Russia must deescalate the situation along the border and withdraw its forces from the territory of Ukraine. We continue to call on Russia to end its illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine and uphold their OSCE principles and commitments. This includes in military transparency.

Sadly there are places within the OSCE region where conflict continues. As you said, Minister Rau, we need to be mindful of the humanitarian impact and that civilians’ lives need to be protected and regional stability not placed at risk. In Georgia, civilians continue to be denied free movement in the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ceasefire violations following last year’s Nagorno-Karabakh conflict sadly continue to lead to civilian casualties. We encourage all parties to work with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to deliver a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the conflict. In Moldova, we see people’s lives being disrupted, and human rights concerns in the Transnistrian region. We support the OSCE’s efforts and conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation structures in all the above cases.

As you mention, your Excellency, our security remains indivisible. The OSCE is the forum for discussing security concerns with and between all 57 participating States. Each participating State has an equal right to security and is free to choose or change its security arrangements. There should be no spheres of influence.

The principle of cross-dimensional approach to security also remains at the heart of our OSCE commitments. How we support our democratic institutions, including through ensuring the freedom of the media and the monitoring of elections, and the full implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms are key aspects of that approach. We need to remind ourselves that the hard-won gains of past decades can never be taken for granted, anywhere.

Finally, we support your ambition for adoption of the unified budget. The OSCE’s Unified Budget is essential to enable a smooth operation. Alongside the OSCE’s Secretariat, the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and field missions undertake excellent work to support implementation of our collective OSCE principles and commitments. They need to be adequately financed in order to achieve this role. We particularly underline the need for ODIHR to have sufficient funding to carry out its elections work and other activities in support of participating States.

Your Excellency – in concluding, we wish you and your team the very best in the important year ahead in the OSCE. Please be assured of the UK’s support and we stand ready to play our part and to enter into discussions in good faith.

Thank you.

[Change to Plan 1 student loan interest rate](#)

News story

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a change to the Plan 1 student loan interest rate.



Pre-2012 income contingent (ICR) student loans have an interest rate of either RPI (determined on the basis of the RPI rate from the March prior to the September when the new interest rates are implemented) or the Bank Base Rate + 1%, whichever is the lower (this is known as the “low interest cap”). The low interest cap mechanism means that the interest rate on Plan 1 loans can change in-year, if the Bank Base Rate changes.

Currently the maximum interest rate for pre-2012 income contingent (ICR) student loans is 1.5% (RPI). However, as the Bank Base Rate + 1% is lower than this, the low interest cap is in place.

On 16 December, the Bank Base Rate changed to 0.25%. In line with this, from 13 January 2022 the interest rate for pre-2012 ICR loans will increase to 1.25%.

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[Report 01/2022: Derailment and fire](#)

involving a tanker train at Llangennech, Carmarthenshire

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PDF, 18.4 MB, 91 pages

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Summary

At about 23:04 hrs on 26 August 2020, train 6A11, the 21:52 hrs service from Robeston (Milford Haven) to Theale, conveying 25 laden tank wagons, derailed near Llangennech, in Carmarthenshire. The derailment and the consequent damage to the wagons resulted in a significant spillage of fuel and a major fire. The driver, who was unhurt, reported the accident to the signaller. Subsequent examination of the site found that ten wagons (positioned third to twelfth in the train) had derailed, and that around 446,000 litres of fuel had escaped.

The spilled fuel caused major damage to the environment in an area which is both a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and a special area of conservation (SAC), including cockle beds, natural tidal mud flats and wetlands.

The derailment occurred because one set of wheels on the third wagon in the train stopped rotating during the journey. The wheelset had become locked, probably because of a defect in the braking system on the third wagon, arising from deficiencies in the design and maintenance of components. The sliding of the locked wheel along the railhead caused damage to the profile of the wheel treads. This meant that the wheels were unable to safely negotiate Morlais Junction, near Llangennech, damaging the pointwork and causing the third wagon to become derailed. The following wagons derailed on the damaged track. Some of the derailed tank wagons were ruptured in the accident, and the spilling fuel ignited.

Recommendations

RAIB has made nine recommendations. These cover a review of the actions taken by the owner of the wagons following this and previous accidents, and improvements to the maintenance processes at the locations where the wagons involved in the accident are maintained and overhauled. The probable failure mode of the braking system and the lessons learned from reconstruction tests

have led to a recommendation to the manufacturer of some of the braking system components to undertake a review of their design. A recommendation has been made to the organisations who carry out surveillance and certification of entities in charge of maintenance of rail freight vehicles to review their processes. A further two recommendations have been made to improve the management of wagon maintenance on the railways in Great Britain, and to review the technology and systems used to alert traincrew, signallers and railway control offices to wagon defects that may lead to derailment. The final recommendation is for a review of the arrangements for regulatory oversight of entities in charge of maintenance and certification bodies that are not based in the UK.

Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:

“Trains carrying dangerous goods play an important role in the UK economy, but the risks which their operation presents must be adequately controlled. The consequences when things go wrong can be disastrous, as we saw at Llangennech in August 2020. Thankfully no one was hurt, but people were evacuated from their homes and the damage, both to the environment and to people’s livelihoods, will take years to put right. The accident also closed the railway line for more than six months whilst the railway was being rebuilt and engineers worked to minimise the damage to the local environment.

“The rail industry’s approach to the safe maintenance of freight wagons needs to improve. In this investigation we found that there were inadequate maintenance practices, and a failure to appreciate the importance of the correct fastening of the various components of the tanks wagons’ braking system. This is not the first time that we have investigated an accident where RAIB has identified serious issues with the maintenance of a freight train. Over the last decade we have identified deficient wagon maintenance as a factor in more than ten investigations, including maladjusted suspension, undetected frame twist and worn bogie pivot liners.

“In our report we have recommended a review of the technology and systems currently being used in the UK and other European countries to identify how improvements can be made to the railway’s ability to detect a wagon defect that may lead to a derailment, such as dragging brakes. The smarter use of track side technology to warn the railway that a train is endangering its infrastructure is a familiar RAIB theme; some of our previous investigations have urged the greater use of wheel impact load detection data to identify uneven wheel loads. RAIB would like to see more work in this area focused on how track side systems could be used to reliably detect dragging brakes, but also, how such data can be used in an intelligent way to benefit both real-time operations and fleet maintenance management.

“The majority of our recommendations following our extensive investigation of the derailment at Llangennech relate to improved maintenance processes for freight wagons. The widest ranging of these urges the freight sector, in conjunction with Network Rail, to develop a comprehensive programme of measures designed to promote the improvement of freight wagon maintenance in the UK. This is intended to be a collaborative effort, which is appropriate given the potential benefits of better information sharing across the sector.

“I would like to stress the importance of getting this right. It’s time that freight wagon maintenance practices were subject to careful examination and for the industry to think through the way that it can best deliver on its legal and moral obligation to present wagons that are fit to operate through the nation’s towns and cities. The prize for getting this right is improved safety, better reliability and compliance with the freight sector’s legal obligations – and all at a reasonable cost.

“Since RAIB has been concerned about the quality of freight wagon maintenance for many years, I welcome the actions that ORR has taken to reinforce its supervision of entities in charge of maintenance. This will provide improved visibility of maintainers’ important work and verify the extent to which the important role of ECMs is properly understood and applied across the UK freight sector, and the adequacy of surveillance undertaken by certification bodies (whether based in the UK or in the EU).

“I have been struck by the extent to which the safe condition of freight wagons is critically dependent on people being given the tools and training they need to do a difficult job, very often in dark, wet and cold working conditions. So, I urge freight operators and maintainers to think carefully about the people who do the hands-on work, and the things that could be done to develop the capability of the work force.”

Notes to editors

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.
3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

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[Appointment of Bishop of Salisbury: 13 January 2022](#)

Press release

The Queen has approved the nomination of The Very Reverend Stephen Lake, Dean of Gloucester, for election as Bishop of Salisbury.



The Queen has approved the nomination of The Very Reverend Stephen Lake, Dean of Gloucester, for election as Bishop of Salisbury, in succession to The Right Reverend Nicholas Holtam following his retirement.

Background

Stephen trained for ministry at Chichester Theological College. He served his title at Sherborne Abbey with Castleton and Lillington in the Diocese of Salisbury and was ordained Priest in 1989.

He became Vicar of Branksome St Aldhelm from 1992 and was additionally appointed Rural Dean of Poole in 2000. In 2001, Stephen was appointed Sub Dean of St Albans, and took up his current role as Dean of Gloucester in 2011.

Stephen is a Church Commissioner and Lead Dean for Safeguarding. He is married to Carol and they have three adult children.

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