

Stonehaven report sets out measures to boost rail resilience

- final report sets out how railways can be protected from climate change and extreme weather
- Transport Secretary commissioned review immediately after Stonehaven tragedy in August 2020
- report informed by 2 taskforces – one on weather and one on earthworks management

The government has today (17 March 2021) published Network Rail's final report on [how the resilience of the UK's rail network can be improved](#), in light of the [Stonehaven tragedy](#) last year.

The report was commissioned by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps immediately after the incident, in which 3 people died when a passenger train hit a landslide and derailed while travelling through bad weather near Carmont, Aberdeenshire.

The document is informed by the work of 2 independent taskforces – one which looks at weather conditions and the other at earthworks management – and includes a range of recommendations to further safeguard railways from extreme weather.

Network Rail has already started implementing some of these recommendations, building on an acceleration of works and investment in the resilience of the UK's railways over the last decade.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

The accident at Stonehaven in August was devastating, and my thoughts remain with the families of Brett McCullough, Donald Dinnie and Christopher Stuchbury, who tragically lost their lives.

We must do everything we can to keep our railways safe, and I immediately commissioned this report so that lessons would be learnt without delay.

These findings will inform our work as we push ahead with measures to make our railway more resilient in future and less vulnerable to sudden tragedies like that near Stonehaven.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

Safety is our absolute priority, which is why we have instructed Network Rail to publish regular updates on how it will deliver these recommendations to give passengers confidence.

These reports underline the importance of investing in our railway, to keep passengers and staff safe both now and in the future.

Between 2019 and 2024, Network Rail will make a record investment of £1.3 billion in strengthening the railway's resilience to extreme weather.

Network Rail's operations, maintenance and renewals budgets continue to be ringfenced, with the Spending Review committing over £40 billion as part of efforts to increase investment in rail infrastructure.

The final report examines all available evidence about the Stonehaven tragedy, the immediate steps taken afterwards and the current challenges of managing 200,000 earthwork sites over 20,000 miles of track across the UK.

Martin Frobisher, Network Rail's safety and engineering director, said:

The UK's railway is one of the safest in Europe, but something went tragically wrong at Stonehaven last summer, and our thoughts remain with the families and friends of Brett McCullough, Donald Dinnie and Christopher Stuchbury.

Heavy rain caused ground slips on many occasions across the entire network last year. Although tragic accidents are, thankfully, incredibly rare and none other than Stonehaven caused injuries, it is clear that extreme weather presents a significant challenge to the way we safely and reliably manage railway infrastructure.

We do a vast amount to tackle the effects of climate change already, but there is more to do. We established 2 independent, expert taskforces led by world-class specialists to investigate the problems we face and, crucially, to guide us as we make substantial improvements.

We will carefully consider every single recommendation and develop a science-backed improvement plan to target available money and technology in the best possible way. This is a real breakthrough.

The document builds upon the [Resilience of Rail Infrastructure interim report](#), which was also commissioned by the Transport Secretary immediately after the Stonehaven incident and published in September 2020.

Neither the final nor interim reports pre-empt the outcome of the independent investigation by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) into the Stonehaven incident. RAIB is due to publish its findings later this year.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack on Scotland's Q4 2020-21 GDP

Press release

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack's response to the gross domestic product (GDP) for Scotland (first estimate) for 2020-21 quarter four.



Scottish Secretary Alister Jack outside of Queen Elizabeth House, Edinburgh.

Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack said:

While today's figures show signs of resilience for the economy over the winter months, we know the current lockdown continues to affect many individuals and businesses.

The UK Government's package of measures continues to support Scottish jobs and businesses – and at the budget we extended our furlough and self-employed schemes, the Universal Credit uplift and VAT cuts for the hardest hit sectors. On top of the £9.7bn already provided to the Scottish Government, we announced a further £2.5bn for the next financial year.

There are reasons to be hopeful as we move into the Spring – we are starting to see the impact of the UK Government funded vaccination programme and we are directly supporting Scotland's economic recovery through our Plan for Jobs, investing in communities and accelerating the energy sector's green transition.

As we have seen over the last year, the strength and economic stability provided by the Union has never been more important and will ensure we build back from the pandemic together.

Background

- The UK Government's furlough scheme has been extended until the end of September 2021, paying up to 80 percent of wages. The self-employed support scheme has also been extended to the end of September 2021 with eligibility extended to 600,000 criteria extended. So far these schemes have supported more than 930,000 jobs in Scotland.
- More than 90,000 businesses in Scotland have been supported from UK Government business loans worth £3.4 billion.
- The UK Government is investing billions to help people of all ages back into work, including our £2 billion Kickstart scheme for young people, sector work programmes and recruitment of thousands of additional Work Coaches.
- The UK Government has provided billions in extra funding for the welfare system for those unable to access other forms of support. This includes £20 Universal Credit uplift which has also been extended until the end of September 2021.
- This support is on top of an additional £9.7 billion of additional funding provided to the Scottish Government this financial year (20/21) to tackle the pandemic, plus an additional £2.4 billion in 21/22.
- The UK Government continues to provide the bulk of COVID-19 testing in Scotland and has moved quickly to buy vaccines, securing more than 400 million doses from seven vaccine developers for distribution across all parts of the UK.

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[Love Island star urges Brits to get their COVID jab](#)

- Yewande Biala releases video to encourage young people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds to get COVID jab
- In the video, she speaks with Professor Kevin Fenton and Dr Emeka Okorochoa to address the most common questions on the vaccines
- Video is part of efforts to tackle vaccine hesitancy and boost uptake as COVID vaccine is offered to all adults by the end of July

Today, Yewande – a science graduate who worked in vaccine development – has released a video in which she discusses the COVID-19 vaccine with Professor Kevin Fenton, Regional Director at Public Health England, and Dr Emeka Okorochoa, a frontline A&E doctor, to help answer common questions from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities about the jab.

Yewande, Professor Fenton and Dr Emeka discussed the strict safety and effectiveness standards that have to be met before a vaccine is approved,

addressed some of the false information on social media about vaccines, and talked about how local communities are working to increase vaccine uptake across the country.

They discussed why people from BAME backgrounds are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, the risks of sharing false information and the importance of younger people getting vaccinated when they are invited to protect themselves and those around them from coronavirus.

Yewande Biala said:

As someone that has previously worked with vaccines, I feel like I have a responsibility to help to increase confidence and trust in communities where there has been low take-up.

It was important for me to hopefully educate people on the importance of vaccines and in particular the COVID-19 vaccine, helping to answer some questions they might have.

Minister for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Nadhim Zahawi said:

Effective vaccines will not only protect people from coronavirus, they will save thousands of lives and we want every eligible person to benefit from a free vaccination, regardless of their ethnicity or religious beliefs.

The government and the NHS are working hard to encourage people in all communities to come forward and accept the offer of a jab when it comes, and it's great to have Yewande support these efforts to boost vaccine uptake among young people and those from minority ethnic groups.

The vaccination programme will continue to expand over the coming weeks and we remain on track to meet our target of offering the vaccine to all adults by the end of July.

Professor Kevin Fenton, Regional Director at Public Health England said:

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a devastating year which has touched every corner of our lives and the consequences have been felt deeply in black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who have been disproportionately affected by the virus. The reasons for the health inequalities due to COVID-19 are complex but are linked to demographic, underlying health, geographical and socioeconomic factors, such as where you live or the occupation you're in.

It's important we all take advantage of getting vaccinated so we are protected as we ease out of lockdown and remerge into society.

Over 24 million people have now received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose, meaning almost half of the adult population have been vaccinated and will soon develop strong protection from serious illness, saving countless lives and significantly reducing pressures on the NHS.

People who have received a letter inviting them for a jab can log on to the national booking service at www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination.

[Watch the video.](#)

Professor Kevin Fenton is Regional Director at Public Health England and has worked in a variety of public health roles across government and academia.

Dr Emeka is a frontline A&E medical doctor who is passionate about providing good healthcare and healthcare education to the public. Dr Emeka posts informative and engaging social media videos on important medical facts, health advice, myth busting and COVID-19 updates, which his thousands of followers find beneficial.

Among adults aged 16 to 29 years, 17% reported hesitancy towards the coronavirus vaccine, compared with 1% of adults aged 80 years and over, according to the [latest ONS data](#). This was the highest of all age groups. The data also indicates that less than half (49%) of black or black British adults reported that they were likely to have the vaccine; higher proportions were reported amongst white (85%) and mixed ethnicity (80%) groups.

Each of the vaccines are tested on tens of thousands of people across the world. They are tested on both men and women, on people from different ethnic backgrounds, representative of the UK population and of all ages between 18 and 84. All vaccines being used in the UK have undergone robust clinical trials and have met the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's strict standards of safety, effectiveness and quality.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccines, see the [frequently asked questions answered by Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam](#).

[Lockdown job success, generous funding helps charity change veterans' lives](#)

RFEA is the only charity to provide life-long, life-changing support, job opportunities, and training to service leavers, reservists, veterans and their families, irrespective of circumstances, rank, length of service, or reason for leaving.

The charity's work has received vital ongoing support thanks to a generous

donation of £91,800 from The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) and its funding partner, Greenwich Hospital, which provides support to serving and former members of the Naval Service and their families.

The funding is part of a successful multi-year partnership which continues essential employment support for Royal Marine and Royal Navy Veterans across the country, with services encompassing all elements needed to be successful in an employment search. This includes CV advice and interview skills, through to support with finding suitable employment opportunities, as well as motivation and workplace social skills. This funding is especially important as unemployment is rising in 2021 and the numbers registering for support in January 2021 is at an all-time high.

The charity also works with clients to identify any other underlying issues, such as housing, debt, substance or alcohol misuse, or health problems, such as PTSD, which may act as a barrier to securing meaningful employment.

Employment and wellbeing support are going to be a critical need for recovery from the impacts of Covid-19 and thanks to the backing of RNRMC, RFEA will be able to offer help to the increasing numbers of veterans seeking its support since the pandemic.

In the last year alone, RFEA has helped change the lives of 739 ex-Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel, by improving their social stability, health and wellbeing and their basic skills, leading to 71% securing meaningful job roles during this time.

Nicki Bradley from Plymouth, a former Leading Naval Nurse in the Royal Navy, served from 1992 to 2006. After leaving the Service she struggled to transfer her valuable experience into skills that were recognised by civilian employers. RFEA was able to help her recognise the value of her skills and translate them into suitable job opportunities. With the support of her RFEA Regional Advisor, Nicki secured a job placement, which led to her being employed in her current role as a part-time administrator.

Nicki says:

After 3 years of unemployment after being made redundant, my new job means I am able to come off benefits and be proud to be earning my own money once more. I feel I have purpose again and can convey this feeling to my children. I can now improve on skills I already possess as well as acquire new ones through workplace development courses.

Commodore Alistair Halliday, RFEA's Chief Executive, comments:

The qualities required for a career in the Services make ex-Forces personnel a fantastic addition to the civilian workforce, which is why RFEA's team are so passionate about helping veterans, and their families, to find meaningful employment. We provide an invaluable,

tailored support service to ensure our clients are equipped with everything they need to demonstrate the value and relevance of their experience to civilian employers.

By doing so, we bring about life changing transformations for thousands of veterans, and their families, every year. We are delighted to be able to continue to do this, thanks to the incredible support of RNRMC.

Mandy Lindley, Director of Relationships and Funding at RNRMC adds:

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity is pleased to continue its partnership with RFEA, helping to provide vital employment support to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines veterans. The economic impact of COVID-19 means that it is now more critical than ever that our veterans receive the right care and this grant will allow RFEA to continue providing a fantastic standard of employment support for our joint beneficiaries.

[Student Loans Company recruits technology professionals to help transform the delivery of student finance](#)

Press release

Student Loans Company has over 40, permanent digital and technology opportunities



The Student Loans Company (SLC) is on a major recruitment drive to expand its

technology function to support the delivery of student finance for the UK Government and devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Student Loans Company has over 40, permanent digital and technology opportunities for people with a variety of skills and ambitions. The roles, which include Digital Developers, System Testers, Architecture and Technical Designers will be based within the organisation's Technology Group either in Glasgow or Darlington.

With a mission to enable access to further and higher education for students across the UK, SLC is set to play an important role in the delivery of the UK Government's freshly announced Skills for Jobs agenda. These new roles will be instrumental to the delivery of SLC's technology strategy and driving forward higher education policy, while helping to transform how student finance is delivered in the future.

SLC's Chief Information Officer, Stephen Campbell said: "There has never been a more exciting time to join SLC as we build on the progress already made in our multi-year transformation programme which aims to deliver an outstanding customer experience through use of new technology.

"SLC was recently awarded Investors in Diversity accreditation and is an organisation of scale with a range of opportunities for personal development and supported career progression. We are committed to developing the skills of our people and giving colleagues the opportunity to apply those skills, within a supportive and inclusive team.

"Working in an environment that is similar in scale to a medium sized retail bank, the new roles will be critical to our delivery of an outstanding customer experience for students, graduates and further and higher education providers across the UK."

As well as offering a competitive salary SLC offers a range of benefits and rewards, including Civil Service pension, and will consider flexible working. For more information and the current vacancies available visit <https://www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/index.cgi> and search Student Loans Company.

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