

UK calls for fresh Presidential elections in Belarus

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has called for fresh Presidential elections to be held in Belarus, following the publication of an independent report which confirmed that August's election was "falsified" and exposed the extent of human rights violations committed by Lukashenko's regime.

The UK led the diplomatic campaign for an international and independent investigation through the OSCE into reports of electoral fraud throughout the Presidential elections and the Belarusian authorities' campaign of violence, intimidation and harassment against peaceful protestors.

The UK expressed early concerns about the conduct of the elections and the grisly repression that followed. In September, the UK imposed landmark sanctions on Alexander Lukashenko, his son and senior figures in the Belarusian government under the UK's new human rights sanctions regime in response to the torture and mistreatment of hundreds of peaceful protestors in custody.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

We pushed for this independent investigation and it has exposed the fraud at the heart of the Presidential elections and the despicable actions taken by Lukashenko's regime to suppress the Belarusian people.

New elections which are free and fair must now be organised, and those responsible for the violence against demonstrators held to account.

The UK, alongside 16 international partners, invoked the Moscow Mechanism at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in September which triggered an investigation by an independent human rights rapporteur into electoral fraud and the brutal violation of the rights of the Belarusian people.

The independent OSCE investigation concluded there is overwhelming evidence that:

- The elections were falsified.
- The Belarusian authorities committed massive and systematic human rights violations in response to peaceful demonstrations and protests.
- There is a climate of impunity and no one has been held accountable for torture and inhumane treatment by the security forces.
- The freedom of the media and the safety of journalists are under

sustained attack by the Belarusian regime.

The UK condemns the efforts made by the Belarusian regime to undermine the independent investigation, including its refusal to cooperate with the fact finding mission or to allow the mission to enter Belarus. We strongly encourage Belarus to reverse its decision and engage constructively with the OSCE.

The UK will continue to work with international allies to defend democracy, media freedom and human rights in Belarus. The UK supports the recommendations of the OSCE report and calls on the Government of Belarus to hold new Presidential elections, immediately end the violence, release all those unjustly detained, investigate allegations of torture and take action to ensure humane conditions in detention.

Notes to Editors

Seventeen OSCE participating States invoked the Moscow on 17 September in response to events following the 9 August presidential election in Belarus. The Moscow Mechanism allows groups of OSCE States to trigger expert missions to report on serious human rights concerns.

[Letter from Glenys Stacey to Gavin Williamson, 5 November 2020](#)

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[NHS Test and Trace hits record testing](#)

capacity as over 10 million people tested at least once

NHS Test and Trace figures published today show the service has now reached more than 1.7 million people, with more than 10 million people in the UK tested at least once. This week's figures come after the [government's announcement earlier in the week](#) that the target of reaching 500,000 testing capacity by the end of October has been exceeded.

A total of 32,745,923 tests have now been processed in the UK since the service began. 1,960,138 tests (pillars 1 and 2) were processed during the [week 22 to 28 October](#), an increase of 67,435 compared with the previous week. With 624 test sites already in operation and more opening every week, the median distance people are now travelling to a test centre has continued to decrease, to 2.7 miles.

Latest figures show an improvement in test turnaround times for all in-person tests routes. 61.8% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, meaning that 3 out of 5 people are receiving next day results. This is compared with 46.5% the previous week, while 86.1% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours. NHS Test and Trace focuses on using the increase in capacity to deliver ongoing improvements to turnaround times and these continue to trend positively.

With cases continuing to rise across the UK, and local tracing partnerships having been launched with 148 local authorities, the number of people reached by NHS Test and Trace has increased and people are being reached more quickly. During this reporting week, more than 115,660 people who tested positive were reached and asked for their contact details, 82.7% of the total number of people transferred into the contact tracing system. 3 out of 4 of these people were reached within 24 hours. A further 150 local tracing partnerships are in the process of being implemented.

The number of contacts identified is also increasing, up 14% from the previous week. For those where communication details were available, 77.8% were reached and asked to self-isolate. For contacts not managed by local health protection teams, 139,328 (75.4%) cases were reached within 24 hours, an improvement on previous weeks and the highest since the end of September.

The weekly statistics from the 22nd week of NHS Test and Trace show in the most recent week of operations (22 to 28 October):

- a total of 1,960,138 tests were processed (pillars 1 and 2), a 3.6% increase from the previous week
- 115,660 (82.7%) people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 100,189 (83.2%) the previous week
- 196,067 (77.8%) contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 173,856 (74.6%) the

previous week

- 61.8% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 46.5% the previous week
- 26.4% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 22.6% the previous week
- 92.9% of satellite (care home) tests were received within 3 days after the day they were taken, compared with 91.0% the previous week, an increase of over 60 percentage points since the start of September despite over 4 times as many being received
- since NHS Test and Trace launched, over 1.8 million contacts have been identified, and 80.4% of all contacts where communication details were given have been reached and told to self-isolate

Latest figures also show that the NHS COVID-19 app has been downloaded more than 19.2 million times since it was launched.

As a result of partnerships with NHS and university labs, new cutting-edge testing innovations and a recruitment drive boosting the UK's coronavirus diagnostic network, NHS Test and Trace has rapidly expanded testing capability ahead of winter. The government is committed to continue expanding the capacity of the network of UK test sites and laboratories to make it even easier to get tested and reduce the time it takes to receive test results. More than 3,000 new recruits have joined the lab network since April, while advances in innovation and technology continue to speed up processing and add to capacity.

This increase in testing capacity works to improve test turnaround times. It also allows us to expand our mass testing programme, giving us the spare capacity to undertake pilots such as the [Liverpool testing pilot](#) announced this week, as well as the [asymptomatic testing of NHS staff and professionals who regularly visit care homes](#).

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

Latest figures show NHS Test and Trace is processing more tests and reaching more people, which means we are finding positive cases and helping to break chains of transmission.

We know that there are areas where we still need to improve and we are working tirelessly to make the service quicker and more effective every day. We have expanded capacity to over 500,000 tests a day to help meet demand over the winter period and continue to improve test turnaround times. Increased capacity and testing innovations have also allowed us to start regular testing of staff across the NHS and care homes, which will start tomorrow.

NHS Test and Trace is a crucial weapon against this virus, but it is not a silver bullet. I urge everyone to follow new restrictions and book a test if you have symptoms to help protect each other during this time.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We have now reached the milestone of 500,000 testing capacity. This, alongside an ever growing network of test sites, more than 600 so far, means that those who need a test can get a test more easily than ever. Everybody involved in NHS Test and Trace should feel extremely proud of their achievements.

However, we do know that more needs to be done. We are constantly looking for new ways to improve the service, scoping out new technologies, partnerships and ways of working to equip us to better support our people, locally and nationally.

Maximum lab capacity is classed at around 85% of total capacity, in order to ensure that the system will operate safely and reliably – this approach aligns with other health and care systems.

See more on the [new guidance to support safe care home visits during lockdown](#).

[500,000 daily testing capacity reached in ongoing drive to boost test and trace](#)

[Chancellor statement to the house – Furlough extension](#)

Mr Speaker,

On Monday, the Prime Minister set out the action we need to take between now and the start of December to control the spread of coronavirus.

In response, we're providing significant extra support to protect jobs and livelihoods in every region and nation of the United Kingdom:

An extension to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme;

More generous support to the self-employed and paying that support more quickly;

Cash grants of up to £3,000 per month for businesses which are closed, worth over £1 billion every month;

£1.6 billion for English councils to support their local economy and local healthcare response;

Longer to apply for our loan schemes and the Future Fund;

The chance to top-up Bounce Back Loans;

And an extension to the mortgage payment holidays.

All on top of more than £200 billion of fiscal support since March.

This statement follows the Bank of England's monetary policy decisions earlier today, meaning all economic and monetary institutions are playing their part.

As you would expect, the Governor and I are in constant communication as the situation evolves.

Our responses are carefully designed to complement each other and provide certainty and support to people and businesses across the UK. The Bank's forecasts this morning show economic activity is supported by our substantial fiscal and monetary policy action.

And the IMF just last week described the UK's economic plan as "aggressive", "unprecedented", successful in "holding down" unemployment and business failures and "one of the best examples of coordinated action globally".

Mr Speaker,

Our highest priority remains the same: to protect jobs and livelihoods.

That's why we've already decided to extend the Job Retention Scheme to December.

But people and businesses will want to know what comes next; how long we plan to keep the scheme open, and on what terms.

They want certainty.

The government's intention is for the new health restrictions to remain only until the start of December.

But, as we saw from the first lockdown, the economic effects are much longer lasting for businesses and areas than the duration of any restrictions.

And as the Bank of England have said this morning, "the economic recovery has slowed", and the economic risks are "skewed to the downside".

Given this significant uncertainty, a worsening economic backdrop, and the need to give people and businesses security through the winter, I believe it is right to go further.

So we can announce today that the furlough scheme will not be extended for one month – it will be extended until the end of March. The government will continue to help pay people's wages, up to 80% of the normal amount.

All employers will have to pay for hours not worked is the cost of Employer

NICs and pension contributions.

We'll review the policy in January to decide whether economic circumstances are improving enough to ask employers to contribute more.

Of course, as the furlough itself is now being extended to the end of March, the original purpose of the Job Retention Bonus to incentivise employers to keep people in work until the end of January – obviously falls away.

Instead, we will redeploy a retention incentive at the appropriate time.

And for self-employed people, I can confirm the next income support grant which covers the period November to January, will now increase to 80% of average profits, up to £7,500.

Mr Speaker,

I also want to reassure the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The furlough scheme was designed and delivered by the Government of the United Kingdom on behalf of all the people of the United Kingdom – wherever they live.

That has been the case since March; it is the case now; and will remain the case until next March.

It is a demonstration of the strength of the Union – and an undeniable truth of this crisis – we have only been able to provide this level of economic support because we are a United Kingdom.

And I can announce today that the upfront guaranteed funding for the devolved administrations is increasing from £14 billion to £16 billion. This Treasury is, has been, and will always be, the Treasury for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker,

I know that people watching at home will have been frustrated by the changes the government has brought in during the past few weeks. I have had to make rapid adjustments to our economic plans as the spread of the virus has accelerated.

So I'd like to take this opportunity to explain how and why this has happened.

During the summer, as we began slowly unlocking it was our hope the country would continue to be economically open, albeit with local restrictions being put in place as and when needed.

We knew there would likely be a resurgence in the spread of the virus, but with increased NHS capacity and Test and Trace, our belief was we would be able to stay ahead of the virus.

On this basis we designed an economic approach which continued providing wage support to people, incentivised businesses to retain staff beyond the end of the furlough scheme and created new job creation and training schemes, such as Kickstart.

All built to support an economy that was broadly open but operating with restrictions and overall lower demand.

At the time this approach was not Government acting alone. Our proposals secured wide ranging support, from the TUC to the CBI.

It was their hope, as it was ours, that the public health situation would allow us to keep businesses and workplaces open.

The virus however, continued to spread. Localised restrictions were having an impact, and so we intensified this approach and added further areas.

As these restrictions intensified, the economic impact, particularly on industries such as the hospitality sector, was significant.

So in response, we altered our approach to wage support, making it much more generous to employers and in turn protecting jobs.

We also introduced a range of grants to businesses, whether open or closed, to help them meet their fixed costs.

And additional funding for local authorities to respond to specific local economic challenges.

But again, the virus continued to spread, but more quickly.

And so we arrive at last week, when the government's scientific and medical advisers presented data which showed that R is greater than 1 in all parts of the UK, that the NHS was at risk of being overwhelmed in a matter of weeks and the likely resultant loss of life that would accompany such an event.

The only viable solution left to protect our NHS was the re-imposition of temporary significant enhanced restrictions in England, in addition to those in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

And so, given these changed public health restrictions and the economic trauma they would cause in job losses and business closures I felt it best to extend the furlough scheme, rather than transition at that precise moment to the new Job Support Scheme.

Now political opponents have chosen to attack the government for trying to keep the economy functioning and to make sure the support we provide encourages people to keep working.

And they will now, no doubt, criticise the government on the basis we have had to change our approach.

But to anyone in the real world, that's just the thing that you have to do

when circumstances change.

We all hope for the best, but make sure we plan for any eventuality.

We can reintroduce the furlough now only because we kept the system on which it is based operational, because there was always the possibility that we would be back in this situation.

I'll leave it to the people of this country to decide whether they believe the Government is trying its best to support people through an unprecedented crisis.

To decide whether it is a good or bad thing to alter our economic plans as the health restrictions we face change.

What I know is that the support we are providing will protect millions of jobs.

What I know is that it is never wrong to convey confidence in this country and our economy through our words and action.

And what I know is today's announcement will give people and businesses up and down our country immense comfort over what will be a difficult winter.

And I commend this Statement to the House.

Government extends Furlough to March and increases self-employed support

- businesses and people across the UK given certainty over winter months with further support announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak
- the furlough scheme will now be extended until the end of March – protecting millions of jobs across all nations
- the next self-employed income support grant will also increase from 55% to 80% of average profits – up to £7,500

Workers across the United Kingdom will benefit from increased support with a five-month extension of the furlough scheme into Spring 2021, the Chancellor announced today, 5 November.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will now run until the end of March with employees receiving 80% of their current salary for hours not worked.

Similarly, support for millions more workers through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) will be increased, with the third grant covering November to January calculated at 80% of average trading profits, up

to a maximum of £7,500.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

I've always said I would do whatever it takes to protect jobs and livelihoods across the UK – and that has meant adapting our support as the path of the virus has changed.

It's clear the economic effects are much longer lasting for businesses than the duration of any restrictions, which is why we have decided to go further with our support.

Extending furlough and increasing our support for the self-employed will protect millions of jobs and give people and businesses the certainty they need over what will be a difficult winter.

The Chancellor also announced today an increase in the upfront guarantee of funding for the devolved administrations from £14 billion to £16 billion. This uplift will continue to support workers, business and individuals in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The furlough scheme was initially extended until 2 December. But the government is now going further so that support can be put in place for long enough to help businesses recover and get back on their feet – as well as giving them the certainty they need in coming months. Evidence from the first lockdown showed that the economic effects are much longer lasting for businesses than the duration of restrictions.

There are currently no employer contribution to wages for hours not worked. Employers will only be asked to cover National Insurance and employer pension contributions for hours not worked. For an average claim, this accounts for just 5% of total employment costs or £70 per employee per month. The CJRS extension will be reviewed in January to examine whether the economic circumstances are improving enough for employers to be asked to increase contributions.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has acted with speed to protect lives and safeguard jobs with an unprecedented £200 billion support package. The furlough scheme has protected over nine million jobs across the UK, and self-employed people have already received over £13 billion in support. This is in addition to billions of pounds in tax deferrals and grants for businesses.

On top of this, the government has announced:

- cash grants of up to £3,000 per month for businesses which are closed worth more than £1 billion every month
- £1.1 billion is being given to Local Authorities, distributed on the basis of £20 per head, for one-off payments to enable them to support businesses more broadly
- plans to extend existing government-backed loan schemes and the Future Fund to the end of January, and an ability to top-up Bounce Back Loans

- an extension to the mortgage payment holiday for homeowners
- up to £500 million of funding for councils to support the local public health response.

Further Information

- More information on today's policy announcements can be found here: [economic support factsheet](#) (PDF, 143KB, 5 pages).
- This is just one element of the comprehensive package of support the government has set out for businesses, including more than £65 billion in government-backed loans, which have now been extended until 31 January, deferral of VAT payments, business rates holidays, generous grants for hospitality, leisure and retail businesses, a moratorium on eviction for commercial tenants and the Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme.
- In addition, the Jobs Retention Bonus (JRB) will not be paid in February and the government will redeploy a retention incentive at the appropriate time. The purpose of the JRB was to encourage employers to keep people in work until the end of January. However, as the CJRS is being extended to the end of March 2021, the policy intent of the JRB falls away.

Support for Devolved Administrations

- In July, the UK Government announced an unprecedented upfront guarantee of resource funding for the devolved administrations. This has meant the devolved administrations have funding certainty ahead of UK Government making announcements.
- Today the UK Government is continuing to provide that upfront certainty by giving the Devolved Administrations an additional £2 billion as part of the guarantee, to at least £16 billion this year above the funding outlined in the Spring Budget 2020.
- This is based on the central forecast for UK Government expenditure in 2020-21 and means an extra £1 billion for the Scottish Government, £600 million for the Welsh Government and £400 million for the Northern Ireland Executive.
- Today's announcement means a total increase of at least £8.2 billion of additional funding for the Scottish Government, £5.0 billion for the Welsh Government and £2.8 billion for the Northern Ireland Executive, on top of their Spring Budget 2020 funding.

Scotland

- We have given the Scottish Government an additional £8.2 billion to cope with the pressures of the pandemic and we are protecting more than 123,000 jobs in Scotland through the furlough scheme, down from a peak of more than 930,000 in June.
- More than 76,000 loans worth more than £2.1 billion have been offered under the Bounce Back Loans Scheme
- More than 3,300 loans worth £758 million have been offered under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- 126,000 people in Scotland have benefitted from the Self Employment

Income Support Scheme.

Wales

- We have given the Welsh Government an additional £5 billion to cope with the pressures of the pandemic and we are protecting more than 68,000 jobs in Wales through our furlough scheme, down from a peak of 378,400 in June.
- More than 48,000 loans worth more than £1.3 billion have been offered under the Bounce Back Loans Scheme
- More than 1,600 loans worth £373 million have been offered under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.
- 82,000 people in Wales have benefitted from the Self Employment Income Support Scheme.

Northern Ireland

- We have given the Northern Ireland Executive an additional £2.8 billion to cope with the pressures of the pandemic and we are protecting more than 35,000 jobs in Northern Ireland through our furlough scheme, down from a peak of more than 240,000 in June.
- More than 33,000 loans worth more than £1 billion have been offered under the Bounce Back Loans Scheme
- More than 1,000 loans worth £333 million have been offered under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- 56,000 people in Northern Ireland have benefitted from the Self Employment Income Support Scheme.