

Letter to medicines and medical products suppliers: 3 August 2020

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1. 28 December 2020

Added message that DHSC's requests of industry set out in this letter remain valid and current, after the trade and cooperation agreement reached between the EU and the UK.

2. 13 August 2020

Based on wider consultation and feedback, we have updated the letter to include mention of the cross-government reasonable worst case scenario (RWCS) being used for planning purposes and some of the fundamentals of those assumptions, including the time-limited nature of any potential disruption.

3. 3 August 2020

First published.

Coronavirus: £100m Zoo Animals Fund opens for applications

The £100m Zoo Animals Fund, [announced on 27 June](#), is now open for applications.

The new fund will provide funding for zoos and aquariums which need additional support in caring for their animals following a drop in income caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

From today, licensed zoos and aquariums which are facing severe financial difficulties as a result of the virus will be able to apply for government grants of up to £730,000 to pay for animal welfare related costs and essential maintenance.

Grants will be awarded on the basis of need where zoos face a shortfall despite doing everything they can to reduce their costs and raise income. This will include money to pay for veterinary care, medicines and animal feed

as well as paying for staffing costs for those directly providing animal care.

The fund also offers grants to support rehoming costs in the event that zoos need to downsize or potentially close, and is open to those zoos which have already received support through the £14 million Zoo Support Fund.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

It has been great to see zoos and aquariums welcoming people back again over the past six weeks, but I know what a challenging period this remains and hope the opening of the fund provides some much-needed relief.

We'll continue to work closely with the zoo community over the coming months, and remain absolutely committed to ensuring that zoos and aquariums have the support they need to provide the best possible care for their animals.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay said:

Zoos and aquariums have done a fantastic job in reopening safely in challenging circumstances, and it is brilliant to see so many of them busy welcoming visitors to their parks.

However, we remain committed to giving them the continuing support they need to look after their animals over this winter, which is why this fund, open for applications from today, will help zoos maintain their world-leading animal welfare standards.

There are already a number of support schemes available to zoos, including the Job Retention Scheme, VAT deferral, Business Rates Relief, the Business Interruption Loan schemes, the option to reclaim the costs of Statutory Sick Pay and grant funding of up to £25,000 available through the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund.

The Zoo Animals Fund will remain [open for applications](#) until 16 November 2020 and will run until the end of March 2021.

[£20 million to improve small business leadership and problem-solving skills](#)

in the wake of coronavirus

- Government investment in small business training, management and productivity
- £20 million commitment at critical time for small businesses dealing with the impact of coronavirus
- interested small business leaders are encouraged to sign up

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis spurs British businesses to adopt new ways of working, the government is investing £20 million to improve small businesses' management, productivity and problem-solving skills through 2 training programmes, at this crucial time in the UK's economic recovery.

The [Small Business Leadership Programme](#) will focus on strengthening decision-makers' leadership skills, so they are able to address management challenges, some of which, such as remote working, have arisen from coronavirus. The programme will equip business leaders with the confidence and leadership skills to plan for the future of their business, and ensure that they are in a great position to recover from the impacts of coronavirus.

The 10-week programme – which will be delivered virtually by experts from university business schools – will teach participants how to maximise their business's potential by improving productivity, organisation and efficiency. Business will undertake a series of 90-minute webinars delivered by leading business experts, and will also be required to complete up to two hours of independent study and peer supported learning per week.

Additionally, the [Peer Networks Programme](#) will focus on helping business owners improve their problem-solving skills, through a series of guided exercises. Participants will take part in sessions where common coronavirus related business challenges will be discussed, such as finding new customers and using technology such as customer record management and websites to adapt a business model. Members of the programme will be given skills in areas such as leadership and management, sales and marketing that they need to tackle these challenges head-on while growing their business.

Small Business Minister, Paul Scully, said:

I know from my own experience of running small businesses just how valuable the advice and experience of experts and peers can be when you are looking to grow your company.

The strength of small businesses up and down the country will be vital as we begin to bounce back from coronavirus and re-build our economy. These schemes will help equip small business leaders with the leadership, resilience and problem-solving skills they need to grow their firms in the wake of this pandemic.

Anne Kiem, OBE, CEO of Chartered Association of Business Schools and Executive Director of the Small Business Charter, said:

The effects of coronavirus have been particularly damaging for small businesses and providing their leaders with the experience and knowledge to survive and thrive will be essential for the future success of the country. While cash injections are important, for the long-term, business leaders need the skills to ensure they and their businesses are resilient and can grow throughout this period and beyond. Accessing experts from the world-leading business schools we have in this country will be an essential resource for businesses in the months and years to come.

Mark Bretton, LEP network Chair, said:

As business led Local Enterprise Partnerships with 330 business leaders on our boards, we know the positive impact that proven business leadership and exceptional management skills can have on a business, especially as they face the challenges of COVID-19. But not all businesses have ready access to that level of leadership, the Peer Networks offers them that ready access for free just when they need it most.

The Peer Networks project could make all the difference to the survival of a business and boost their bottom line. The expert knowledge and leadership delivered through the 38 LEP Growth Hubs across the country will be the key to its success, allowing businesses to feed off each other's knowledge can inspire them to adopt new practices and embed new approaches that could be a game changer.

There are 2,000 places available on the Small Business Leadership Programme and 6,000 on the Peer Networks programme.

Sir Philip Barton appointed as Permanent Under-Secretary of new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Cabinet Secretary, with the approval of the Prime Minister and Foreign

Secretary, has announced the appointment of Sir Philip Barton as the Permanent Under-Secretary of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said:

I am delighted that Sir Philip has been successfully selected as the Permanent Under-Secretary of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. He is an outstanding public servant and diplomat with experience across all areas of foreign policy.

Philip is well placed to bring together the talent and expertise of both departments while helping combine our foreign and development policy in a way that is innovative, ambitious and more integrated than ever before.

I'd like to pay tribute to Sir Simon, one of the finest diplomats of his generation, who helped successfully steer the FCO during a remarkable period of change in the world. His legacy of progress and modernisation will be part of the DNA of the new department.

The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Mark Sedwill, said:

I am delighted Sir Philip Barton has been appointed to lead the formation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Philip will bring to the role an understanding of overseas development funding together with experience of international relations. Under his leadership, I am confident that the new organisation will strengthen the UK's global leadership by aligning our development and diplomatic efforts to bring more coherence to our international presence.

I should also like to thank Sir Simon McDonald for his leadership of the Foreign and Commonwealth office for the last five years, and Nick Dyer who has been leading the Department for International Development on an interim basis since March.

Commenting on his appointment, Sir Philip Barton said:

I am delighted to have been appointed as the Permanent Under-Secretary of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I look forward to bringing together our diplomats and development experts to deliver for the people of the UK and act as a force for good around the world.

Sir Philip will take up his new post next month, on September 1.

Further information

- Sir Philip is currently the High Commissioner to New Delhi.
- Prior to that he held roles in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as Director General, Consular and Security and before that as the acting Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee in the Cabinet Office.
- Earlier in his career he was the High Commissioner to Islamabad, Deputy Head of Mission in Washington, and Director, Foreign Policy and Afghanistan/Pakistan co-ordinator.

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[Exams and assessments in 2021](#)

We understand students preparing to take exams and assessments in 2021, and their parents, carers and teachers, are concerned about the impact coronavirus (COVID-19) has had on their education. We have consulted on proposals for changes to exams and assessments next year, given the disruption and potential for on-going public health safeguards, and developed a package of measures. Overall, these will free up teaching time, reduce pressure on students and allow assessments to be undertaken within current public health restrictions.

GCSEs, AS and A levels

In [his letter to us, the Secretary of State for Education explained that he was not minded to specify changes to the content which forms the foundation for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications](#), because of the impact this could have on students moving to the next stage of education; he asked us to provide advice on the options for the 2021 exams. We have carefully considered the responses to our consultation in this context, and are today (Monday 3 August) [confirming the changes we will require exam boards to make to exams and assessments next year](#). This includes changes to 15 A level subjects, and 25 GCSEs. Based on the most commonly taken combinations of GCSEs, most GCSE students will benefit from the changes being made.

Changes include:

- changes to how content is assessed in GCSE geography, history and ancient history, to help teachers and students cover that content in appropriate depth, as we proposed in our consultation
- changes to GCSE English literature, to introduce a choice of topics on which students are required to answer questions in their exams. The

government, which is responsible for content, has decided to allow for this change in light of the responses to the consultation. As this subject is taken by the majority of students, and typically taught alongside English language, this will ease the pressure on many students and teachers

- changes to the requirement for a specified number of days of fieldwork in a number of subjects. Teachers widely welcomed our proposed changes to the requirement to carry out GCSE geography fieldwork, while noting the importance of fieldwork to the subject. A number of respondents argued strongly for a similar adjustment to be made to AS and A level geography, because of the potential obstacles they foresee for students undertaking fieldwork during the next academic year. As such, we have decided to align the approach in A level geography to that of GCSE, although A level students will still have to undertake an individual investigation. We have also confirmed similar decisions for GCSE, AS and A level geology; AS and A level environmental science; and modified the arrangements for observation in GCSE astronomy
- changes to how the assessment of students' spoken language skills is reported in modern foreign language GCSEs – students' speaking skills will be assessed through a teacher endorsement alongside the 9 to 1 grade. Common assessment criteria will be produced for teachers to use when assessing students' spoken language skills, so that these can be assessed within teaching, giving centres some flexibility over how they approach the oral component of the assessment
- a range of modifications to the non-exam assessment arrangements in a number of subjects to accommodate potential public health requirements, for example, GCSE food preparation and nutrition, GCSE, AS and A level music and GCSE physical education

Full details of the subject by subject changes [are outlined in our decisions document](#).

Optional questions, length and format of papers

We have considered feedback about the use of optional questions. Many respondents arguing in favour of optional questions were in fact discussing introducing a choice of topics on which students will be examined, similar to the changes proposed for GCSE history and ancient history and (now) GCSE English literature in 2021. We appreciate why optional questions might appear attractive, but evidence indicates this can have unintended consequences – with some students, particularly those who tend to perform less well in exams, doing worse when given more freedom over question choice.

Similarly, we received a range of responses to our proposal that exam boards should not generally change the length or format of their exam papers, except where needed to accommodate other agreed changes to the exams. While some respondents argued for shorter and/or fewer papers and some for different question styles such as multiple choice questions, others shared our concern that the lack of familiarity could have a negative impact on students' preparation – particularly those with a special educational need or disability. Having considered the responses in detail, we have decided it is

in students' best interests if exam boards do not make these changes, except where needed to accommodate the specific changes to the exams we have set out.

Timing

We also sought views on possible changes to the summer 2021 timetable. While there was general support for a delay to the exams, to allow more time for teaching, respondents were less positive about this if it meant a potential delay to results. We will continue to work with the DfE, exam boards, regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland, and groups representing schools, colleges and higher education to consider the best approach, and we will confirm our decisions as soon as possible.

Standards

We understand students and teachers want reassurance about how outcomes might be protected through our approach to grading next year, as we did to protect the interests of students who took the reformed qualifications for the first time. This will play an important part in our overall support for the 2021 cohort. We are considering our approach and will provide further information in due course.

Contingency plans

In line with the Secretary of State's letter to Ofqual, we are planning for exams and assessments to be taken next year. Nonetheless, we recognise there could be further disruption next year. We will continue to develop contingency measures, exploring different options.

Vocational, technical and other general qualifications

Learners taking vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and general qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A level have also experienced lost teaching time and we are today launching our [consultation on a range of proposals for VTQ assessments in 2021 and a new version of the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework \(ERF\) to support the 2020/21 approach](#). These are designed to help mitigate the impact of this disruption and respond to any future public health measures.

VTQs serve a mixed purpose, ranging from those taken alongside, or instead of, general qualifications to progress in education; to those used to signal occupational competency – which, by necessity, often include substantial practical elements that cannot be wholly accommodated through online learning. It is important that any changes to assessments in 2021 qualifications continue to deliver qualifications that are a valid and reliable indication of knowledge, understanding, skills, or practical competence, and that, as far as possible, standards are maintained.

As government's expectation is that assessments will take place during

2020/21, we do not consider that it will be necessary to permit awarding organisations to offer calculated results to any learners in 2020/21. We have engaged widely with awarding organisations, professional bodies and providers and consider that permitting awarding organisations to adapt their assessments is the best way to mitigate for the longer term impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). This may include widening assessment windows to provide greater flexibility, streamlining assessments to free up time for teaching and learning, or changing some assessment requirements to deal with the impact of any ongoing social distancing measures, such as group performances.

Because of the diversity of VTQs, a single approach would not be feasible, and instead, we intend to work with awarding organisations to support their decision-making around what adaptations are suitable for different qualifications. We will work with awarding organisations, in sector-specific groups and across different types of qualifications, to facilitate common approaches to help ensure that approaches are as consistent as possible across similar VTQs. This will be informed by a set of objectives and additional guidance we will produce, to run alongside the ERF. We will look to consult on this guidance later this month, alongside any other changes we feel are necessary to the ERF for our 2020/21 approach.

The consultation is open until 14 August 2020.