

# The Queen praises FCO staff for COVID-19 work at virtual visit

Her Majesty The Queen praised the 'incredible work' of FCO staff responding to the coronavirus pandemic during a virtual visit and portrait unveiling.

The Queen saw the painting being unveiled via a video call on Friday afternoon, the first time a portrait of a Member of the Royal Family has been unveiled virtually.

The artwork – commissioned by the FCO and painted by winner of the 2018 BP Portrait Award, Miriam Escofet – will be proudly on display in the refurbished reception of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

During the visit, Her Majesty talked to staff who worked around the clock to repatriate British nationals who struggled to get home due to lockdown measures around the world, and also heard about work the UK Government is doing internationally to develop a vaccine.

During the virtual visit, Her Majesty The Queen said:

It sounds as though everybody in the FCO has been doing the most incredible work. I must say I'm very impressed to hear about it. >

On the portrait itself, The Queen said:

I'm glad I've had the chance to see it. I hope I'll see it in real life one day.

Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said after the visit:

We are honoured to have Her Majesty The Queen see this unique portrait unveiling and hear about FCO's vital work responding to the coronavirus pandemic, getting British travellers home and working with other countries to develop a vaccine.

Her Majesty The Queen is our best diplomat. This beautiful new portrait is a tribute to her lifetime of service and we're glad our many visitors will see it for years to come.

Portrait artist Miriam Escofet said:

It was a huge honour to paint a portrait of Her Majesty and to join The Queen to unveil the portrait virtually. I wanted the portrait to capture Her Majesty's humanity, her radiance and her warmth, which came through so strongly in the two portrait sittings.

## Further information

\*Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)

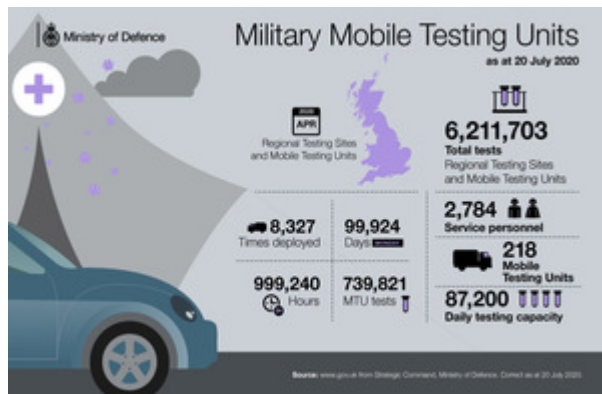
\*Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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## [Handover of Mobile Testing Units](#)

### News story

Military support to the National Testing Programme will be handed over in coming weeks as the Department for Health and Social Care establishes a long-term plan to deliver Coronavirus tests.



Since April, the world-renowned UK Armed Forces have deployed thousands of personnel at short notice to support Coronavirus Testing. They have worked alongside NHS staff and civilians at both Regional Sites around the country and in Mobile Testing Units, helping to deliver more than 6 million tests.

The Mobile Testing Units played a vital role in helping essential workers, who were most vulnerable to the virus, access tests. The unit was designed by British Army engineers [in just 7 days](#). Since the programme began, more than 2,700 service personnel have run 218 mobile testing units, working nearly 1 million hours to conduct more than 700,000 tests around the country. Now the Armed Forces will train civilian contractors to continue this essential role.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Thousands of our Armed Forces personnel – regular, reservists plus supporting civilians – stepped up to serve on the front line in the fight against coronavirus.

The four month mission of those on the national testing programme helped to carry out more than six million tests, with 218 military Mobile Testing Teams deploying around the country as needed. This is an extraordinary effort.

As those teams now train civilian contactors to continue the work I want to say a huge thank you to our Armed Forces for doing what they do best and supporting the nation's resilience in a time of crisis.

Maj Gen David Eastman MBE, Commander Standing Joint Command (UK), the headquarters who lead the Armed Forces' response to Covid-19, said:

I am incredibly proud of our servicemen and women who designed and deployed with the Mobile Testing Units across the United Kingdom and provided the public with professional and efficient testing facilities. We are delighted to be able to support and complement the testing centres established by the NHS and will continue to deliver on any request for assistance in the fight against the Coronavirus.

In Northern Ireland, mobile testing units have been civilian operated from the outset. The handover process has now begun in England, Scotland and Wales.

- Key Facts

- Overall the National Testing Programme has conducted 6,211,703 tests at both Regional Testing Sites and Mobile Testing Units (as at 20 July).
- Military Mobile Testing Units have deployed 8,327 times, working 99,924 days or 999,240 hours, conducting 739,821 tests.
- 2,784 service personnel delivered 218 Mobile Testing Units with a daily testing capacity of 87,200 (as at 13 July).

Read more about how the UK Armed Forces supported the response to COVID-19 at the [Voices of the Armed Forces blog](#)

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## Green light for increase in speed through roadworks

After extensive and innovative research and trials, the company has confirmed that where it is safe for road users and roadworkers, and where shown on road signs, vehicles can be driven at up to 60mph.

That's 10mph faster than the current 50mph norm.

The move comes in response to feedback from road users who said they were frustrated at not being able to go quicker. And the results show as well as saving time, more people are sticking to the higher speed limit, so bringing safety benefits.

Jim O'Sullivan, Highways England Chief Executive, said:

All of our research shows that road users benefit from 60mph limits in roadworks. They have shorter journey times and feel safe.

Road users understand that roadworks are necessary, but they are frustrated by them. So testing 60mph has been about challenging the norm while ensuring the safety of our people working out there and those using our roads.

We have a huge programme of work planned, so being able to use 60mph where safe will continue to improve everybody's experience of our roads.

Highways England recently completed delivery of the Government's first road investment programme. Roadworks are necessary to carry out the improvements.

Acting on road user feedback the company committed to working out how it could safely increase the speed limit.

The work involved on road trials in various scenarios, road user, roadworker and stakeholder feedback and comprehensive risk assessments.

The aim was to understand how drivers felt about the 60mph limit and that it could be delivered safely for road users and road workers.

Findings announced today by Highways England show using 60mph within roadworks on eight road schemes resulted in drivers saving on average (across all sites) up to almost 3,780 hours journey time each day. Although average speeds increased, more drivers stayed within the speed limit than when compared to driving at 50mph.

Anthony Smith, chief executive of the independent watchdog Transport Focus, welcomed the change. He said:

We know road users want speed limits in roadworks to be no lower than necessary to maintain safety – so 60mph in roadworks wherever it is safe to do it is a welcome step.

Road users said they found 60mph appropriate and felt safe, and shared their positive experiences, saying:

- “The 60mph definitely helps ... I just said I can’t believe the time we’ve made up already in our journey”
- “Overall, I would say I agree with it being put up to 60 to allow the journey time to be more efficient and to decrease the frustration of drivers”
- “Oh excellent, yeah okay, 60mph rather than 50, that means we’ll get through a little bit quicker”

Some road projects, which trialled the 60mph during an eight or 10-week period over the last 18 months, were confident with how the increased speed limit was operating so rolled it out further within the roadworks or kept it on until the work completed.

On the M1 between junctions 13 to 16 in Northamptonshire, the M6 between junctions 13 to 15 in Staffordshire, and on the M4 between junctions 3 to 12 near Reading, the 60mph is still in use as work continues to upgrade the road – further benefiting thousands of people each day as they use these motorways.

The 60mph through roadworks trial looked at different ‘scenarios’ within roadworks on England’s strategic road network of motorways and major A roads, and was funded through Highways England’s ring-fenced innovation designated fund.

For more information about the 60mph within roadworks trials visit [Highways England’s website](#)

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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# Spain removed from travel corridors exemption list

- Spain no longer on travel corridor list, travellers arriving into England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland from Spain from midnight tonight will need to self-isolate
- people already in Spain can stay for the remainder of their holiday and will have to self-isolate upon return
- FCO now advising against all but essential travel to mainland Spain

People returning to the UK from Spain (including islands) from midnight tonight (25 July 2020) will need to [self-isolate for 2 weeks](#), with the country removed from the travel corridors list.

Following a significant change over the last week in both the level and pace of change in confirmed cases, Spain has been removed from the [list of countries where people do not have to self-isolate when arriving into to the UK](#).

People currently on holiday in Spain are encouraged to follow the local rules, return home as normal and check the FCO's travel advice pages on GOV.UK for further information.

FCO is [advising against all but essential travel to mainland Spain](#) – this does not cover the Canary Islands or the Balearic Islands because travel advice is based on the risk to the individual traveller and COVID-19 infection rates are lower there than mainland Spain.

People will still need to self-isolate when returning from anywhere in Spain as well as the Canary and Balearic Islands because self-isolation arrangements are put in place on the basis of risk to the UK as a whole.

A government spokesperson said:

The Joint Biosecurity Centre together with Public Health England have updated their coronavirus assessments of Spain based on the latest data. As a result, Spain has been removed from the lists of countries from which passengers arriving in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are exempted from the need to self-isolate.

Protecting public health is our absolute priority and we have taken this decision to limit any potential spread to the UK.

We've always been clear that we would act immediately to remove a country where necessary. Both our list of quarantine exemptions and the FCO travel advice are being updated to reflect these latest risk assessments.

Changes to the exemption for people returning from Spain will take effect from midnight tonight, meaning anyone returning from midnight tonight will have to self-isolate.

The government has made consistently clear it will take decisive action if necessary to contain the virus, including if the public health risk of people returning from a particular country and not self-isolating becomes too high.

The devolved administrations have all taken the same decision today, so travellers arriving from Spain into all parts of the UK will need to self-isolate.

The government is urging employers to be understanding of those returning from Spain who now will need to self-isolate.

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## [Excess weight can increase risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19](#)

Being obese or excessively overweight increases the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, a [new Public Health England \(PHE\) report](#) confirms.

The report summarises findings from evidence published during the pandemic on the effects of excess weight and obesity on COVID-19. UK and international evidence suggests that being severely overweight puts people at greater risk of hospitalisation, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) admission and death from COVID-19, with risk growing substantially as body mass index (BMI) increases.

The current evidence does not suggest that having excess weight increases people's chances of contracting COVID-19. However, the data does show that obese people are significantly more likely to become seriously ill and be admitted to intensive care with COVID-19 compared to those with a healthy BMI.

One study found that for people with a BMI of 35 to 40, risk of death from COVID-19 increases by 40% and with a BMI over 40 by 90%, compared to those not living with obesity. Other data found that in intensive care units, 7.9% of critically ill patients with COVID-19 had a BMI over 40 compared with 2.9% of the general population.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of adults in England are overweight or obese, with people aged 55 to 74, those living in deprived areas and certain black, Asian and minority ethnic groups more severely affected.

Excess fat can affect the respiratory system and is likely to affect

inflammatory and immune function. This can impact people's response to infection and increase vulnerability to severe symptoms of COVID-19. Obese people may be less likely to access healthcare and support, and it is also thought that COVID-19 affects other diseases associated with obesity.

The report highlights that supporting people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight may reduce the severe effects of COVID-19 on the population, especially among vulnerable groups that are most affected by obesity.

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at Public Health England, says:

The current evidence is clear that being overweight or obese puts you at greater risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19, as well as from many other life-threatening diseases.

It can be hard to lose weight and even harder to sustain it, which is why people cannot easily do it on their own. Losing weight can bring huge benefits for health – and may also help protect against the health risks of COVID-19. The case for action on obesity has never been stronger.

The report notes some limitations on evidence to date and highlights the need for more evidence, including research to establish the effect that weight management might have for groups at greater risk of the severe effects of COVID-19.

The report also summarises evidence regarding the nation's eating and exercise habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. While some data suggests that more people have exercised during lockdown, evidence indicates that the nation's exercise levels have not increased overall since before the pandemic. Meanwhile, snack food and alcohol sales in high street shops have increased.

## **Background**

PHE Chief Nutritionist Dr Alison Tedstone and PHE Health Improvement Director Professor John Newton are available for broadcast interview bids.