

Eligibility for government childcare offers protected

Parents who are normally eligible for the government's childcare offers will continue receiving the entitlements during the summer term if their income levels fall due to the impact of coronavirus.

The Government has announced that any working parent usually eligible for 30 hours free childcare or Tax-Free Childcare will remain eligible if they fall below the minimum income requirement due to COVID-19. Subject to Parliamentary approval, parents who are critical workers will also remain eligible for these entitlements if their income has increased over the maximum threshold during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It remains the case that all educational settings – including early years – are closed, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

In response to the challenges many working parents are facing during the pandemic, these changes will mean critical workers and the parents of vulnerable children can still benefit from these entitlements even if their working hours fall as a result of self-isolating, illness, furloughing or job loss – or, in the case of many critical workers, their hours increase.

This temporary flexibility will ensure critical workers can continue to access the childcare they need to enable them to work. These arrangements will be reviewed over the summer.

Minister for Children's and Families Vicky Ford said:

Juggling the demands of work and childcare is never easy for parents, and now more than ever they have our full support. Nurseries, childminders and all our early years settings are working hard to continue offering safe and high-quality childcare places for critical workers and parents of vulnerable children.

No parent whose income falls as a result of this virus should lose their eligibility for free childcare at this time. That's why we are confirming that anyone who was previously eligible should remain so.

I am also asking local authorities to extend the validity of 30 hours codes of any parents who have missed their chance to reconfirm. This will help smooth the transition period when settings reopen.

Parents are required to reconfirm their eligibility for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare quarterly. The 30 hours deadline for the summer term has been extended to the 31st August to give working parents additional time to protect their place.

The temporary changes are in line with wider Government measures to make sure working parents remain eligible for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare even if they fall below the minimum working wage threshold due to coronavirus, equal to 16 hours per week at the national minimum wage.

Local authorities can extend the validity dates on the 30 hours codes received by parents who are critical workers during the summer term, ensuring those who are eligible can access the childcare offer despite having missed their reconfirmation date or the application deadline of 31 March 2020.

[Guidance](#) for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak will be updated in due course to reflect these temporary changes.

This builds on recently announced efforts to boost access to childcare, giving councils the flexibility to move around government funding for free childcare entitlements in exceptional circumstances to make sure sufficient childcare places are available for vulnerable children and those of critical workers.

[Marian Spain appointed new Natural England chief executive](#)

News story

Marian Spain has been appointed as the new chief executive of Natural England, taking the post on a permanent basis.



Marian Spain has been appointed as the new chief executive of Natural England, taking the post on a permanent basis after serving as interim chief

executive since December 2018.

Natural England chair Tony Juniper said:

Marian has shown an unrivalled commitment to protect and enhance our natural environment along with excellent leadership skills.

It is so important not only for Natural England but also our environment to have someone with Marian's passion and experience to lead our teams at this vital time for conservation. She will ensure that the organisation can meet the challenge of restoring nature, which lies at the heart of the government's environmental policy, as the country recovers from the impact of coronavirus.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

I want to thank Marian for all her excellent work over the last year.

As we focus on setting environmental policy and farming support outside the European Union, Natural England has never been so important. I am looking forward to working further with Marian as we link together our wide range of initiatives to restore this nation's nature.

Natural England chief executive Marian Spain said:

It has been an honour to lead Natural England's exceptional, talented and passionate teams and I am so proud to be able to continue.

Every day our people work incredibly hard to make life in our country better. The future of Natural England is an exciting one as we build the partnerships we need to help nature thrive, so that we have a healthier planet and healthier people.

Marian Spain was appointed interim Chief Executive by the Natural England Board in November 2018, taking up the role in December that year.

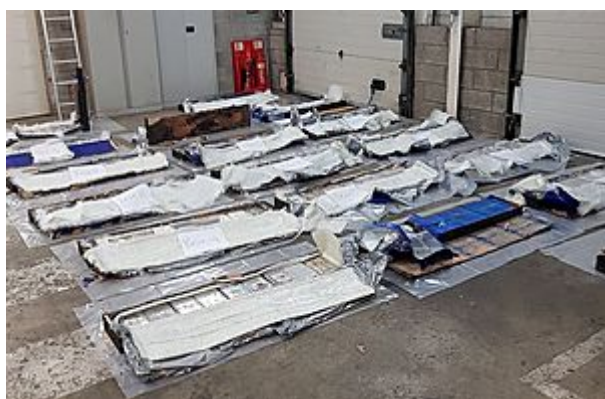
She was chief executive of Plant Life as well as holding a number of senior roles with organisations in the environment sector, including the Environment Agency and Countryside Agency – a predecessor body of Natural England.

Published 5 May 2020

260 kilos of cocaine seized by Border Force at Coquelles

News story

Border Force officers at Coquelles have prevented an attempt to smuggle more than 260 kilos of cocaine into the UK in a lorry.



The seizure, which had a potential street value of around £20 million, happened on 28 April at the juxtaposed controls at Coquelles, France. Officers intercepted a lorry in the UK controlled zone at the port which was found to contain a consignment of car parts. A number of plywood boxes were found within the load which contained more than a quarter of a tonne of cocaine.

Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance said:

This seizure has taken millions of pounds worth of cocaine out of the hands of organised criminals and off our streets.

Drugs are currency for organised gangs and are intrinsically linked to crime, violence and exploitation which is why we will do all we can to stop drug traffickers and bring them to justice.

Following the 28 April seizure the driver of the lorry, a Romanian national, was arrested on suspicion of importing Class A drugs and the investigation was passed to the National Crime Agency (NCA). The driver was later released under investigation.

NCA Dover branch commander Martin Grace said:

We know that international OCGs remain criminally active and despite the restrictions on movement brought about by coronavirus.

As a result of joint working between the NCA and our Border Force partners, attempts to smuggle significant quantities of drugs have been thwarted before creating harm to our communities in the UK.

Border Force officers use hi-tech search equipment to combat immigration crime and detect banned and restricted goods that smugglers attempt to bring into the country.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling should call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or go to <https://www.gov.uk/report-smuggling>.

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Conor Burns MP resignation letter and the Prime Minister's response

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

GAD project helps 1,000+ pension scheme members

Pensions specialists at the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) have completed a project which involved compulsorily transferring the pension benefits of more than a thousand ex-civil servants back into the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

We provided actuarial advice to the different stakeholders involved in this project. These included the trustees of the Babcock Naval Services Pension Scheme (BNSPS), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Cabinet Office as scheme manager to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

GAD put 3 separate teams in place to avoid any conflicts of interest with 'ethical walls' maintained between the teams to ensure client confidentiality.

Transferring benefits

BNSPS was created in 2002 when 1,500 ex-civil servants transferred employment to Babcock and a pension scheme was required that was 'broadly comparable' to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

The security of members' benefits within the scheme was backed by MOD. The introduction of the government's Fair Deal (2013) policy of keeping staff like these in public service pension schemes, rather than in private sector 'broadly comparable' schemes, led to changes.

It was agreed that the ex-civil servants in the scheme would re-join the Civil Service Pension Scheme and their pension benefits in the Babcock scheme would compulsorily transfer back.

Pensions teams across GAD provided actuarial advice around the transfer back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme. The terms of the transfer were agreed in early 2018 after extensive discussions. Implementation began shortly after, and the project was completed in September 2019, having successfully transferred the members back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

Partnership working

Commenting on the extensive project, GAD actuary, Natacha Lamaletie said: "This transfer was one of a kind because all the former civil servants, not just 'active members' in the scheme, were compulsorily transferred back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

"We ensured the project went smoothly and was completed on time. It was a joint effort between a number of GAD teams."

As part of the project, GAD also worked with the receiving pension administrators to make sure their systems were set up to deal with taking on the members' benefits, ensuring seamless transition and payment of benefits.