

PHE plays crucial role in hunt for COVID-19 vaccine

The team has been awarded \$500,000 by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to bolster the international response to coronavirus vaccine and treatment development.

The funding comes as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) funds PHE to evaluate vaccines in their pipeline vaccine that are destined for clinical trials as early as April 2020.

The funding recognises PHE's rare combination of highly specialised facilities and researchers at PHE Porton Down, that enable a rigorous understanding of vaccine and therapeutic safety and efficacy, before new interventions enter human trials. In recent years, this expertise has been successfully used in supporting the development of the Ebola vaccine, licensed in 2019.

PHE Porton Down researchers have collaborated with colleagues at Liverpool and Bristol universities to develop 'synthetic virus' – an exact replica of the actual virus for use in the laboratory. This will enable PHE, working with national and international academic and commercial partners, to carry out rigorous evaluation and testing of vaccines and treatments that enter the clinic.

The government has previously announced £20million of funding for vaccine development, awarded to CEPI, who will award significant further funding to support PHE's work.

PHE Porton Down will start evaluation next week of the Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine that will potentially enter clinical trials in the next month or so.

Prof Miles Carroll, Deputy Director, National Infection Service, Public Health England, said:

Public Health England is uniquely positioned to support and drive the country's hunt for a coronavirus vaccine – using tried and tested methods for the rapid development of interventions for emerging diseases.

We look forward to continuing to work with world-leading academic and pharmaceutical partners to accelerate progress towards safe and effective interventions to limit the impact of this new infection as rapidly as possible.

Lord Bethell, Minister of Innovation, said:

It makes me so proud to see PHE Porton Down demonstrate its world-beating expertise with this US FDA award.

It is a powerful testimony to the expertise and commitment of the remarkable PHE team at this historic site.

[COVID-19: CMA open letter to pharmaceutical and food and drink industries.](#)

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SLC is continuing to support students, universities and colleges and we will be providing further relevant updates here.

Will I still get my next student finance payment?

SLC can confirm that students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their maintenance loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

Can I still apply for student finance?

If you're studying at the moment or you'll be starting a full-time, undergraduate course after 1 August 2020, you can apply online for student finance as normal.

Postgraduate and part-time, undergraduate student finance applications for academic year 2020 to 2021 are scheduled to launch in June. If this changes, we'll let you know through our social media channels.

Will you still take student loan repayments if I can't work due to Coronavirus?

It's important to remember that you'll only make repayments to your student loan once you're earning over the repayment threshold for your [repayment plan type](#). This means that if you stop working, or your income drops below the threshold, your repayments will stop too.

Find out about the repayment thresholds for [Plan 1](#), [Plan 2](#) and [Postgraduate Loans](#).

Further details on exams and grades announced

The exam regulator, Ofqual, and exam boards will work with teachers to provide grades to students whose exams have been cancelled this summer, following our actions to slow the spread of coronavirus.

University representatives have confirmed that they expect universities to be flexible and do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education.

This year's summer exam series, including A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications, and all primary assessments, have been cancelled as we fight to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The Government's priority is now to ensure affected students can move on as planned to the next stage of their lives, including going into employment, starting university, college or sixth form courses, or an apprenticeship in the autumn.

This means ensuring GCSE, A and AS level students are awarded a grade which fairly reflects the work that they have put in. There will also be an option to sit an exam early in the next academic year for students who wish to. Ofqual will develop and set out a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible, and will work with the exam boards to ensure this is consistently applied for all students. The exam boards will be asking teachers, who know their students well, to submit their judgement about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead.

To produce this, teachers will take into account a range of evidence and data

including performance on mock exams and non-exam assessment – clear guidance on how to do this fairly and robustly this will be provided to schools and colleges. The exam boards will then combine this information with other relevant data, including prior attainment, and use this information to produce a calculated grade for each student, which will be a best assessment of the work they have put in.

Ofqual and exam boards will be discussing with teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that it is as fair as possible. More information will be provided as soon as possible.

The aim is to provide these calculated grades to students before the end of July. In terms of a permanent record, the grades will be indistinguishable from those provided in other years. We will also aim to ensure that the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in other years, so that this year's students do not face a systematic disadvantage as a consequence of these extraordinary circumstances.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Cancelling exams is something no Education Secretary would ever want to do, however these are extraordinary times and this measure is a vital but unprecedented step in the country's efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus.

My priority now is to ensure no young person faces a barrier when it comes to moving onto the next stage of their lives – whether that's further or higher education, an apprenticeship or a job.

I have asked exam boards to work closely with the teachers who know their pupils best to ensure their hard work and dedication is rewarded and fairly recognised.

We recognise that some students may nevertheless feel disappointed that they haven't been able to sit their exams. If they do not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis. In addition, if they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam at the earliest reasonable opportunity, once schools are open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

There is a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations, and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged. Ofqual is working urgently with the sector to explore options and we will work with them to provide more details shortly.

The Government will not publish any school or college level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020.

[COVID-19: Updated Contact Centre opening times](#)



An existing news article advised that the DBS Contact Centre had closed temporarily. As of today, 30 March 2020, the Contact Centre has reopened.

The DBS Contact Centre opening hours have changed, as detailed below:

Previous opening hours	Opening hours as of today, 30 March 2020
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm	Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm
Saturday, 10am to 5pm	Saturday, Closed

This decision has been made to maximise availability, ensuring that we have sufficient staff on hand to deal with incoming customer calls, and to ensure we are still able to offer a high standard of customer service to our customers.

If you have a general enquiry, you can still contact DBS via:

You can also track your application online:

- Online tracking for basic DBS checks, [here](#)
- Online tracking for standard and enhanced DBS checks, [here](#)

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1. 31 March 2020

Email updated for barring customers.

2. 20 March 2020

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