

[Launch of a new charity to improve veterinary medicines regulation worldwide](#)

The VMD provides expert training programmes to build global capacity in responsible governance for the manufacture, distribution and use of safe and effective veterinary medicines. With like-minded aims, Safe Medicines for Animals through regulatory training [SMArt](#) is set to positively impact the welfare of animals, people and the environment.

As part of the UK Reference Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance, designated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the VMD and Defra support SMArt as a new global partner working towards safeguarding animal and public health from the threat of Antimicrobial Resistance.

SMArt was launched on 11 March at a reception at the House of Lords attended by Ministers, senior government officials, and leaders in the pharmaceutical industry and representatives from major international charitable bodies: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Flemming Fund; GALVmed, and Wellcome Trust.

The VMD Chief Executive Pete Borriello said “A key to unlocking the benefits of healthy livestock production and animal ownership, while protecting the environment and public health, is effective medicines regulations. SMArt will be able to make a critical contribution to developing this capability.”

[Two years wage growth](#)

The [latest statistics](#) posted a joint-record high employment rate (76.5%), while the number of people employed in the private and public sector reached over 27 million and 5.3 million respectively.

The news follows last week’s budget in which the Chancellor announced an increase to the National Living Wage and raised National Insurance Contribution thresholds to £9,500 – helping those on low pay.

It also included new measures to support workers and businesses to meet current challenges arising from the coronavirus outbreak. The Chancellor allocated £12 billion for temporary, timely and targeted measures such as paying Statutory Sick Pay from day one.

Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP said:

Our focus at present is guiding the country through the worst public health crisis in a generation and supporting families. People across the country are worried about jobs and their future, but with more people in work over the 3 months to January and wages continuing to outpace inflation, we start from a strong foundation. Last week the Chancellor outlined key measures to support British people, British jobs and British businesses through this difficult time.

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Follow DWP on:

Shortage occupation lists (SOLs): commissioning letter from the Home Secretary and letter of response from the MAC

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The Home Secretary has asked the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the shortage occupation lists (SOLs).

Spain travel advice: Foreign Office statement, 18 March 2020

An FC0 spokesperson said:

“The Spanish government have confirmed that all hotels will close in Spain from Tuesday 24 March.

“We therefore advise British travellers in Spain to contact their tour operator or airline as soon as possible, to arrange their return journey home before this date.”

Further details can be found on the [FC0 Travel Advice pages](#).

Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) will increase to 25,000 a day

Officials are working to increase the number of tests that can be conducted by Public Health England and the NHS to 25,000 a day.

The increased capacity is expected to be ready within 4 weeks, with highest-priority cases being tested first.

The announcement follows a meeting at Downing Street last night (Tuesday 17 March), where the Prime Minister and Health Secretary promised industry leaders that they would be given whatever support they need to help government increase testing capabilities across the country.

The Prime Minister also called on companies to work with the government to rapidly develop a test to establish whether people have developed immunity. This will help get NHS and other critical public sector staff back to work as fast as they can.

The increased testing will also include developing a point-of-care swab test outside of hospitals, so people with suspected symptoms can quickly find out if they have coronavirus.

The UK has one of the most sophisticated public health systems in the world and was one of the first countries outside China to have assured testing capability for the novel coronavirus.

Over 50,000 tests for coronavirus have already been completed. It is anticipated that, with increased capacity to 25,000 daily, testing levels in the UK could soon exceed that in China.

Last week, the NHS and PHE increased testing to 5,000 a day and that number continues to increase. By next week it is hoped that testing will increase to 10,000 per day.

Since the end of February, there has been a robust surveillance programme in place. PHE is testing a sample of the population to help us understand the level of virus circulating in the community.

This robust surveillance determines what proportion of the population is affected – and is used by modellers to estimate where we are in the pandemic and to assess the impact of the measures that have been taken.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Public safety is my top priority, and radically ramping up testing for coronavirus is a key part of our plan to protect lives. We are

already among the best in the world for coronavirus testing and today we are launching a national effort to increase our testing capability even further.

Our aim is to protect life, protect the most vulnerable, and relieve pressure on our NHS – so it is right that we prioritise testing for those most at risk of severe illness. We will always do the right thing at the right time, based on the best scientific advice, and will do whatever it takes to protect life.

Professor Sharon Peacock, Director of the National Infection Service at PHE, said:

This is a timely boost to the UK's testing capacity, which is a vital element in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. By working together with industry we can increase the country's testing ability – allowing us to better map the spread of infection in the community and to protect our healthcare workers on the frontline of our response.