

Safe food for tomorrow's world – 2020 Conference programme



A message from [Julian Braybrook](#), the Government Chemist:

I have been monitoring the situation regarding COVID-19 carefully and am committed to the precautions we as a country must take to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Following the recent further government restrictions, I have taken the decision to postpone the Government Chemist Conference to June 2021. These are exceptional times requiring nationwide compliance.

All speakers, sponsorships and registrations will be transferred to the new schedule. I will provide a further update on specific dates over the coming months.

The programme, now transferred to 2021, is in development but will closely resemble the programme detailed below.

The conference will be opened by [Professor Gideon Henderson](#), Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The conference will take place at

Royal Society of Chemistry
Burlington House, Piccadilly
London, W1J 0BA

Conference programme (in progress)

Day 1

- Welcome address by the Government Chemist, [Julian Braybrook](#)
- Keynote lecture – Gideon Henderson, CSA, Defra
- Referee cases outcomes- [Dr Michael Walker](#), LGC
- Food crime – Darren Davies, Food Crime Unit

- Implications of digital technology on enforcement, compliance, policy and legislation – Julie Pierce, FSA
- TBC – Geoff Ogle, FSS
- DEEP Dive – Defra
- The Public Analyst Service – the Future – Jane White, Association of Public Analysts
- US Perspectives on Harnessing Measurement Science to Advance Food Safety – Katrice Lipka, NIST

Day 2

- TBC – Ian Young, Queen University Belfast
- Current perspectives on food toxicology- Stella Cochrane, Unilever
- Proteins for allergens – Milena Quaglia, LGC
- Genetically Modified Organisms – Malcolm Burns, LGC
- Food authenticity- Simon Kelly, IAEA
- TBC – Edward Haynes, Fera
- TBC – Dusty Vyas, LGC
- Sustainable Chemistry – Tom Welton, Royal Society of Chemistry
- Desirability and plausibility of meat alternatives – Barbara van Mierlo, Wageningen UR
- Food contact materials – emerging issues – Tony Lord, Smithers
- International perspective in food sustainability issues- Della Sin, Hong Kong Government Laboratory

On 26 June, immediately following the Government Chemist conference, representatives from National Measurement Institutes worldwide will meet to identify common areas of interest in future food measurement science and discuss how they could be addressed globally. This is a metrology focused event, open to attendants to the conference.

Download the conference programme and workshop information

PDF, 1.43MB, 3 pages

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Get the latest updates to the programme:

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1. 24 March 2020

The Government Chemist has been postponed until 2021. Note from the Government Chemist added.

2. 17 March 2020

COVID-19 information added

3. 3 March 2020

First published.

[Coronavirus action plan: Health Secretary's statement to Parliament](#)

Mr Speaker, with permission I would like to make a statement on the government's [coronavirus action plan](#).

The situation facing the country is increasingly serious.

Globally and at home, the number of cases continues to rise. As of 9am today there were 51 confirmed cases in the UK. It is becoming more likely that we will see widespread transmission here in this country.

Our approach is to plan for the worst and work for the best.

Yesterday I attended a COBR meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, in which we finalised our 4-part action plan to contain, delay, research and mitigate the virus.

This plan has been jointly agreed between the UK government and the devolved administrations.

Copies of the plan have been sent to Members of both Houses and made available in hard copy.

The plan is driven by the science and guided by the expert recommendations of the 4 UK Chief Medical Officers and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

Our plan sets out what we know so far about the virus and the disease it causes, what long-term planning we have undertaken to prepare for a pandemic, what actions we have taken so far in response to the current coronavirus outbreak and, crucially, the role the public can play in supporting our response, both now and in the future.

Mr Speaker, the UK is well prepared for infectious disease outbreaks of this kind.

The international data continue to indicate that for most people, this disease is mild and the vast majority recover in full.

We have responded to a wide range of disease outbreaks in the recent past. The NHS has been preparing for a pandemic virus for over a decade.

We have world-class expertise to make sense of the emerging data.

We have a strong base on which to build.

And while COVID-19 is a new virus, we have adapted our response to take account of that fact.

Our plan sets out a phased response to the outbreak.

Phase one is to contain. This is the phase we are currently in.

Contain is about detecting the early cases, following up with close contacts, and preventing the disease from taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible.

This approach also buys time for the NHS to ramp up its preparations.

If the number of global cases continues to rise – especially in Europe – the scientific advice is that we may not be able to contain this virus indefinitely.

At that point we will activate the delay phase of our plan.

Delay is about slowing the spread, lowering the peak impact of the disease and pushing it away from the winter season.

We are mindful of scientific advice that reacting too early or overreacting carries its own risks.

So, subject to the primary goal of keeping people safe, we will seek to minimise social and economic disruption.

Mr Speaker, the third part of the plan is research.

Research has been ongoing since we first identified COVID-19 and I pay tribute to scientists at Public Health England who were among the first in the world to sequence its genome.

Research is not just about developing a vaccine, which we are actively pursuing, but which will be many months away at the earliest.

Research is also about understanding what actions will lessen the impact of coronavirus including what drugs and treatments – existing and new – will help those who are already sick.

The fourth phase is mitigate.

We will move on to this phase if coronavirus becomes established in the UK population.

At that point, it would be impossible to prevent widespread transmission, so the emphasis will be on caring for those who are most seriously ill and keeping essential services running at a time when large parts of the workforce may be off sick.

Our plans include not just the most likely case, but the reasonable worst case.

We will identify and support the most vulnerable.

If necessary, we will take some of the actions set out in today's plan to reduce the impact of absentees and to lessen the impact on our economy and supply chains.

We prepare for the worst and work for the best.

We commit to ensuring that the agencies responsible for tackling this outbreak are properly resourced, have the people, equipment and medicines they need and that any new laws they need are brought forward as and when required.

This is a national effort.

We need everyone to listen to and act on the official medical advice.

We need employers to prioritise the welfare of their staff.

And the single most important thing that everyone can do, and I make no apologies for repeating this Mr Speaker, is to use tissues when you cough or sneeze and wash your hands more often.

It's in your interest, in your family's interest and in the national interest.

We will get through this Mr Speaker. Everyone has a part to play.

And I commend this statement to the House.

Foreign Secretary's joint press conference Turkish Foreign Minister,

March 2020

Thank you. I'm pleased to be making my first official visit to Turkey as Foreign Secretary. I'm very grateful to my host, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. Thank you Mevlüt for your hospitality.

Like many others around the world, I was absolutely appalled to hear of the tragic deaths of more than 30 Turkish soldiers as a result of brutal regime attacks in Idlib. Once again, I'd like to express my deepest condolences on behalf of the UK government to the Turkish government and indeed to the Turkish people.

For decades, Turkey has been a staunch ally in NATO and one of its largest contributors of military personnel.

We support Turkey's efforts to re-establish the ceasefire agreed in 2018 and to protect those innocent civilians fleeing the regime's monstrous assault. We have also been very clear in our condemnation of the regime's actions in Idlib.

We are gravely concerned by the significant escalation in military action by Russia and the Syrian regime in the North West. We have condemned these actions as flagrant violations of international law and indeed basic human decency.

The UK has raised this issue in multiple multilateral fora. On 28 February, we called for an [emergency UN Security Council session in New York](#). On that same day we, at the NATO North Atlantic Council, expressed our support for Turkey's efforts to re-establish a ceasefire in Idlib.

Our position remains clear. Only a political settlement in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254 can deliver lasting peace in Syria. It is the Syrian regime that continues to stall the political process to end this war, as the first and foremost responsibility for the situation we find ourselves in, and indeed the cost it is inflicting on the Syrian people.

I would like to pay tribute to Turkey's commendable response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. For years, Turkey has helped carry the enormous burden of supporting millions of Syrian refugees, and indeed other displaced persons. Often you have felt ignored.

And Turkey has also played an important role in trying to bring about a political solution through the Sochi process.

The UK remains committed to providing support for both Turkish host communities and Syrian refugees. We know both groups are under sustained pressures.

And with that in mind, it is crucial that unhindered humanitarian access is maintained. Aid must be able to reach those in desperate need. And aid workers must be able to help the most vulnerable without fear of attack.

The UK has played a leading role in supporting the implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal on migration and will continue to do so.

We urgently need to discuss the recent issues at Turkey's Western border, where we have seen a marked increase in migrants seeking transit into Europe. It is imperative that we work together with the international community on Idlib and in any response to a new wave of refugees and the movements of migrants, especially at Turkey's Western border.

Once again, the root cause of this is the reckless and brutal nature of the Syrian regime and the Russian offensive in Idlib. The Syria conflict has been one of the most destructive in recent human history and we want the war to end as quickly as possible.

In particular, we want to end the humanitarian suffering and the UK is also a major donor to the Syria Crisis. To date, we have committed £3.1 billion in response to the Syria Crisis, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. Since 2019, our commitment to projects inside Syria amount to over £220 million. Including emergency food, clean water, tents, medical kits, education and maternal healthcare.

And today, in response to the ongoing situation in Idlib and to help those most in need, we're boosting our UK aid commitment by £89 million to organisations delivering humanitarian aid inside Syria, including around Idlib.

I hope my visit today demonstrates the importance we attach to our relationship with Turkey. We do appreciate that Turkey sits on the frontline of some of the most difficult and serious challenges we face in the region.

We share common objectives in ensuring both our countries and citizens remain safe and I think particularly for the UK, as a NATO ally, G20 member, founding member of the Council of Europe, Turkey is an absolutely indispensable partner.

We work closely together for regional stability and security, protecting our nationals and, as the UK leaves the EU, improving markets for increased investments.

Our counter terrorism cooperation remains strong. The UK stands with Turkey in the fight against terrorism, and recognises the serious threat posed by the PKK. Just last week, Parliament extended the proscription of the UK to acknowledge the HPG and TAK as aliases of the PKK.

Naturally, as close friends, there are issues that we may not agree on. But our close partnership allows us to have frank discussions on issues, such as human rights and the rule of law, which are important to the functioning of any healthy democracy.

Our intention is to continue to work even closer together on defence, security and trade cooperation. The UK's exit from the EU opens up many opportunities for that to happen.

One of our priorities is to agree a Free Trade Agreement with Turkey during 2020. I think that will be a major contribution to a strong Turkey-UK economic relationship and help boost our trading partnership which is already worth around £18 billion per year.

So, finally, I'm here in Turkey to show British solidarity with you, the Turkish people, because when you need our support we will always be there for you. And because our friendship matters now more than ever.

Thank you again Mevlüt for your warm welcome and I look forward to our continued friendship.

Soft power with a hard edge: harnessing the benefits of fast-moving markets

Thank you, Andrea. And welcome: to our panellists; and to those watching online.

We're here today to talk about the changes wrought by the digital revolution. And to discuss what these mean for the future of markets and for billions of people whose lives have been transformed over the last decade or so.

We'll be hearing from business leaders on how emerging technologies and concerns about data and privacy are shaping their industries.

And from competition authorities and experts on the regulatory and policy response to the rise of the tech giants.

In one way or another, we are all trying to respond to the same question. How to shape the future development of digital markets in a way that harnesses the benefits and minimises the harms.

It is one of the greatest challenges facing political economy today. And from it springs a set of very tough questions, for all parties, and particularly for policymakers.

Here are four: First, what, if any, additional powers do competition authorities need?

Second, are competition authorities using their existing powers as effectively as they can? Third, should digital platforms be regulated, and if so, how?

Fourth, are the market-related problems thrown up by digital capable of being regulated in a way that could facilitate and increase competition?

Or would regulation – as it so often does – enfeeble competition, acting as a barrier to entry and facilitating regulatory capture?

Those aren't the only questions. But they're certainly some of the big ones. They are all controversial.

This conference is about how digital is changing business models, changing competition policy, and changing consumer outcomes.

And with that in mind, I'm going to try to add a few thoughts on just the first two of those questions I've set out.

I will also allude briefly to what the CMA is doing on them.

Do competition authorities need extra powers to respond to the digital revolution? And how might they better use their existing ones?

I will argue that the unprecedented challenge of digital will indeed necessitate a strengthening of both competition and consumer protection powers.

And also that a lot more can already be achieved within the existing legal framework if so-called "soft power" can be developed by competition and consumer authorities.

Before entering this contested territory, I want to set out five major points of agreement. It's crucial to keep these in mind.

First, any response to the challenge of digital needs to have in mind the scale of the welfare gains to ordinary people that have been delivered, over the past decade or two.

As both citizens and consumers, we have seen a vast increase in choice and convenience, and lower prices, partly thanks to the growth of online retail.

And particularly as citizens, we have all been empowered in certain ways. Much greater freedom of expression, and new markets, have both tested the traditional model of a paternalistic government, and a dependent people, common in early post-war democracies.

The digital revolution has also released many small firms from the confines of their local markets, and enabled them to obtain access to customers around the world. And it has greatly disrupted many markets and business models – broadcast media, taxis, food delivery and very much more besides.

Almost all of this has been for the better – we like disruptors. Amid the clamour over the menace to markets and society posed by the digital revolution, it is easy to lose sight of all that it has delivered for billions of people.

A second point of broad agreement is that the detriment caused by digitalisation is wide-ranging; it is novel; and it is serious.

The facilitation of electoral manipulation. The amplification of fake news. The erosion of the tax base. The huge increase in the risk of fraud and identity theft. Illegal content, thriving “dark markets” for drugs and weapons, cyber bullying these are not just a minor side-effects. They have the potential to tear at the social fabric of countries. To disrupt not merely the odd market here and there but the post-war liberal order.

None of these are market harms, although it is markets – often the market for digital advertising – which has created the scope for some of these problems to thrive.

Which brings me to my third point of agreement. There are also many new market-related harms. They cannot be left unaddressed. First, there’s the platforms. Global in scale. Dominant in the markets they serve. These platforms can destroy a small business with a change to an algorithm. And they can reap huge and persistent excess rents, protected by data moats, network effects and strategic acquisitions.

As Andrea said only yesterday, there’s probably been underenforcement of merger control in digital markets.

And because of the nature of these markets, this can be particularly costly for consumers. Increasingly, competition authorities are now waking up to this.

What I have summarised there are some of the market harms that directly flow from the platforms.

But they are not the only forms of digital detriment. Individuals are also made vulnerable by the digital revolution. We have been hit by much greater complexity. We have become much more vulnerable to rip-offs. We are all vulnerable to fake reviews giving consumers false confidence. And we are vulnerable to websites that allow sellers to offer event tickets that they don’t own.

We’re vulnerable to hotel booking sites making misleading claims as part of their pressure sales tactics.

And we are vulnerable to automatic renewals of insurance policies – complete with additional loyalty premiums – to which consumers are oblivious because they have been opted-in to paperless communication.

I can’t stress how important it is for us to grasp that this affects not just those considered vulnerable on traditional criteria; but the vast majority of ordinary people.

The fourth thing I think we can agree on is that the economic harms that digital markets bring require a great deal of public explanation.

The political community, in particular, is far more concerned by the risk to their respective Exchequers from the erosion of the tax base; by online harms; by fake news; and by breaches of privacy and cyber risk, than they are by the market consequences of digital platforms.

And in that hierarchy of concerns, politicians are rightly reflecting the views of the ordinary consumers.

The people they represent. Most people don't pay much attention to the price they are paying in personal data for the services provided by platforms such as Facebook and Google. That too is part of the problem.

Competition requires well-informed consumers, with the time and energy to understand what they are paying, whether it is in pounds and pence, or personal data.

Given those areas of agreement – that digital has brought huge welfare gains; that it has had wide-ranging economic and social detriment; that many market-related harms command relatively little political attention – let me turn now to the more contentious questions: Do competition authorities need new powers? And can the existing toolkit be better deployed?

On the first, it is clear that the pace of change in digital markets poses unprecedented challenges for the rules and laws that competition authorities have inherited from an analogue age.

Perhaps this should have been evident a long time ago. But it is now becoming much more widely appreciated. And it is triggering a great deal of argument. In the EU, Margrethe Vestager has suggested changing burden of proof in competition cases.

And she has made clear that responding to digital technology is a top priority for the new Commission.

A large number of international authorities – including Japan, Sweden, Australia and the Netherlands – have initiated studies of digital markets.

Some – including Belgium, Italy and Australia – have highlighted the limitations of existing competition law, and the need for ex ante regulation.

In Germany a new law has been proposed giving the competition authority new powers and tools to deal with digital platforms.

In the US, Elizabeth Warren and President Trump are both critical of digital platforms. They both criticise fake news; and they both want more tax revenues. But they completely disagree on how to deal with it.

This will be a major point of difference between the candidates for the Presidency over the second half of the year.

In my view, the competition authorities best placed to weather the years ahead will be those that have thought clearly about whether they have the right tools, and have said what those tools should be.

And they are also ones that can demonstrate whether they are deploying the tools they do have as effectively as possible.

On this point, a key question for the CMA – and probably for a number of

other authorities – is how hard-edged enforcement tools can and should be buttressed by the greater use of soft power.

By that, I mean: engagement with private sector counterparties, and other public authorities, to discourage some activity and encourage others, to secure well-functioning markets Not just alongside enforcement; but, in some cases, as a way of preventing enforcement action from becoming necessary.

Soft power and hard power are not mutually exclusive. They can reinforce each other.

Hard-edged enforcement against a cartel has a softer side effect. It deters others, and persuades them to change their behaviour. Equally, if people know who we are, they are more likely to report a cartel, and help us enforce against them.

And speaking up can boost the deterrent effect of enforcement, since the public opprobrium and reputational damage that comes from breaking the law is greater. Without deterrence, enforcement is hardly worthwhile. So soft power improves the effectiveness of enforcement. But, as I have set out, it does more than that. It helps competition authorities “reach beyond” enforcement

One further point about soft power. It is enhanced by international co-operation. In my view, working more closely together globally has to be part of the response to digital. We have got to work much harder on it. In fact, dealing with the unprecedented global challenge of the large digital platforms is likely to require unprecedented levels of international co-operation. Between competition authorities. And between those designing and implementing any regulatory frameworks for digital markets.

And that means governments.

The rise of protectionism and populism points in the opposite direction. So this will be a massive challenge for everybody. But the stakes are high. If we fail, we could end up with a patchwork of rules and approaches that will only further entrench the dominance of the biggest players, who are best equipped to deal with the complexity, and best placed to exploit opportunities for regulatory arbitrage. If we fail, we will be destined – as Bill Kovacic, former Chairman of the FTC, recently put it – to “pedal earnestly on bicycles in futile pursuit of industries that move with the speed of racing cars”.

Elsewhere, I have set out in detail both what powers the CMA needs to do its job, and how it can use its existing powers better. I won't rehearse that now. I'm keen to hear from others.

I'll end by saying Harnessing the benefits, and minimising the harms of digital will require major adjustments on our part.

Competition authorities are going to have to become very different institutions in the next quarter century than they have been in the last.

Legislation – on online harm, privacy, tax – is either coming, or it is

already here. And regulation is almost certainly coming in many jurisdictions, too.

This isn't an analytical puzzle with a perfect technocratic solution. And it's certainly not one with an answer that will be right for all time.

The shape of these markets is changing constantly, and so too must the policy response. But if I was forced to try to sum up what the contribution of the CMA can be, it is to deploy our in-house skills to say what we think is likely to be required; to explain why, and if necessary, vigorously; and to do so as part of a continuous discourse, with like-minded bodies in other jurisdictions, and with the markets themselves. Today is just a small part of that effort.

I will hand you over now to Martin Coleman, who will Chair the first panel, looking at how digital disruption is affecting how businesses operate.

UN Human Rights Council 43: UK statement for Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children

Thank you, Madame President,

The UK would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her considerable contributions to this agenda throughout her mandate, in particular her support for the work of the WePROTECT Global Alliance. We welcome her ongoing role as a member of its management board.

The UK echoes the call from the Special Rapporteur for a coordinated global response to eradicate the sale and sexual exploitation of children, collaborating with Governments, NGOs, and businesses, to drive forward work towards Sustainable Development Goals 8.7 and 16.2. All Governments must continue to work domestically, regionally and internationally to build comprehensive child protection systems, improve legislative frameworks, address root causes and vulnerabilities, and deliver support to victims of trafficking and exploitation.

The UK is committed to tackling all forms of child abuse and exploitation, and will publish a national strategy to tackle child sexual abuse this year. This strategy will set out our whole system response to tackling child sexual abuse and how we will work across government, law enforcement, safeguarding

partners and industry to root out offending, to protect victims and to help victims and survivors rebuild their lives.

What are the biggest challenges facing the international community in their work towards the achievement of SDGs 8.7 and 16.2?

Thank you.