



Government *WORLD*™

April - June 2024 British Edition

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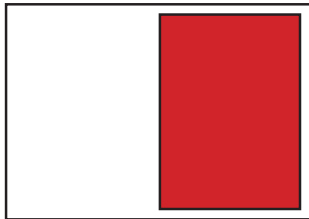
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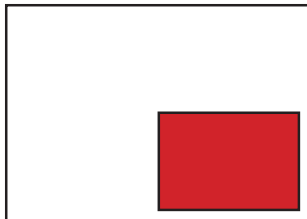
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A friendly caterpillar out looking for some lunch



News Roundup

Summary of the main news and sports events over the last three months

By Paul G Bazeley for Government World

April News Review

The Israel-Hamas war continued with intense military operations in Gaza, that resulted in significant civilian casualties and a deepening humanitarian crisis. The negotiations over the hostages held by Hamas seemingly stalled which complicated ceasefire efforts. Countries including the U.S., Egypt, and Qatar pushed for a truce, though no agreement was reached.



In the Russia/Ukraine conflict, Ukrainian counteroffensives targeted Russian military positions, striking concentrations of troops and equipment including an oil refinery. Ukrainian



forces repelled numerous Russian attacks in key regions, with Russia launching missile and drone strikes on civilian infrastructure across the country. These attacks led to civilian casualties and further damage to critical infrastructure. Ukraine also lowered the age of conscription from 27 to 25.

The UK's Rwanda asylum plan remained a debated policy. The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 allowed the government to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, deeming it a safe third country. The policy faced significant opposition due to concerns about Rwanda's human rights record and questions over the fairness of its asylum system. Legal challenges were ongoing, particularly from human rights groups who argued that the policy violated international law despite these challenges.





The Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf resigned as he was due to face a vote of no confidence that it was believed he would not survive. The SNP leader had faced strong criticism after the power-sharing agreement with the Green Party collapsed.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to increase the UK defence budget to 2.5% of GDP by 2030. The increase means a budget of around £85 billion.

A mass stabbing occurred at a shopping centre in Sydney, Australia, killing six and injuring seven others at the time of writing. The perpetrator was shot and killed by police.

The city of Venice, Italy introduced an entry fee for day visitors. It is believed the fee will help limit the number of



tourists visiting the city.

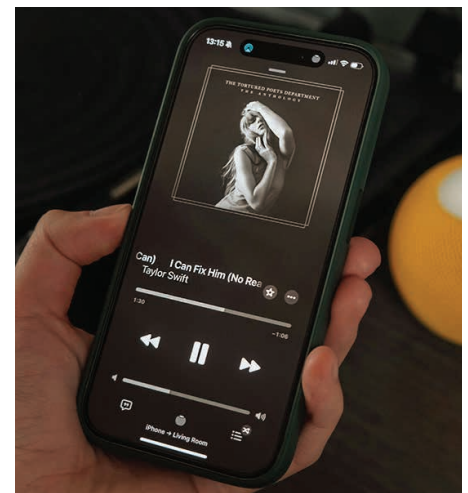
Archaeologists discovered new frescos at Pompeii, the ancient Roman city. The paintings depicted mythological ancient Greek figures.



A total solar eclipse occurred in North America for the first time since 2017. The eclipse was the last solar eclipse to occur in the contiguous United States until 2044.



Taylor Swift released her new album, The Tortured Poets Department. The album broke the Spotify record for most album streams in a single day and Swift broke the record for the most streamed artist in a single day.



April Sports Review

Scottie Scheffler won his second Masters title after finishing the tournament in August, Georgia on 11 under par.



In football, Bayer Leverkusen won their first Bundesliga title, putting an end to the Bayern Munich dominance seen in the league over recent years. Athletic Bilbao beat Mallorca in the Copa Del Rey final to win their first major trophy in 40 years. The final finished 1-1 with Bilbao winning 4-2 on penalties to win their 24th Copa Del Rey.

May News Review

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called for a snap general election, scheduled



for July 4. The news came as a surprise to many, as the government was attempting to address mounting political and economic challenges. The election is set to be the first to require voters to show photo ID at polling stations, following recent legal changes. The news saw parties quickly begin to gear up for intense campaigning. A record number of Conservative MPs stood down after the announcement, while Jeremy Corbyn was expelled from the Labour Party after he confirmed he would stand as an independent candidate in the general election.

The Israel-Hamas conflict remained intense, with significant fighting continuing in Gaza, particularly around the Rafah region. Diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire saw little



progress. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza worsened, with heavy civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. Hostage negotiations continued to stall, keeping tensions high, while both sides faced mounting pressure from their population and other countries.

Russian forces made some notable advances in the northeastern region of Kharkiv, displacing thousands of Ukrainians. Ukrainian troops mounted a defensive counteroffensive, managing to halt Russian progress after initial territorial gains. Missile and drone attacks from Russia continued across Ukraine, targeting civilian infrastructure. The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy



fired the head of the state guards Serhiy Rud after allegations that two members of the guards were involved in an assassination plot against him.

Legal disputes surrounding the Rwanda asylum plan escalated. The FDA officially launched a lawsuit against the policy, arguing that civil servants were being forced to act against international legal obligations, particularly in ignoring European human rights protections. The British government maintained that the plan would curb irregular migration, although only a handful of voluntary deportations occurred.

John Swinney became Scotland's seventh first minister. The new SNP leader was nominated by parliament following the resignation of Hamza Yousof.

The European Union opened a formal investigation into Meta for possible breaches in online content rules relating

to child safety on its Facebook and Instagram platforms, which violate the Digital Services Act.



Scientists announced the discovery of SPECULOOS-3 b, an Earth-sized exoplanet that orbits a red dwarf star that has a similar size to Jupiter.



The 77th Cannes Film Festival took place with the actress Meryl Streep receiving an honorary Palme d'Or award.

May Sports Review

In football, Manchester City won the Premier League title, becoming the first team to win four consecutive top-flight titles. Bayer Leverkusen extended their unbeaten run to 51 matches, a new record and became the first team to win the Bundesliga without losing a single match. In Spain, Real Madrid won La Liga for the 36th time after Barcelona lost to Girona.

Oleksander Usyk defeated Tyson Fury by split decision. The result makes Usyk the first ever undisputed



heavyweight champion to hold four belts in boxing history.

In Formula 1 McLaren driver Lando Norris won his first-ever race after claiming victory at the Miami Grand Prix. The win by the British driver was also



the first victory for McLaren since 2021. Later in the month, Charles Leclerc won the Monaco Grand Prix for the first time, he became the first Monegasque to win the race in 93 years.

June News Review

In the run-up to the general election, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's



Conservatives faced declining poll numbers. Labour, led by Keir Starmer, focused on presenting itself as the solution to economic and social challenges, hoping to capitalise on voter frustration with Conservative governance. The introduction of voter ID requirements for the first time became a key talking point, raising concerns about its potential impact on turnout. Public attention also shifted towards the effects of issues like the cost of living and NHS services. Nigel Farage appointed himself as the leader of the Reform UK party, he is set to run as a candidate for the party in Clacton.

June saw Ukrainian forces conduct counteroffensives, while Russia launched sustained missile and drone strikes on cities, causing civilian casualties. Ukraine began using High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems

(HIMARS) to strike within Russian territory, marking an escalation in tactics. International efforts to provide military support for Ukraine persisted, although frustrations mounted over the pace of weapons being delivered.

There were continued military engagements in Gaza and Israel claimed it had eliminated key Hamas figures. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remained poor, although some crossings, were partially reopened for medical evacuations. International efforts to mediate a ceasefire have gained urgency but failed to reach an agreement.



The WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange entered a plea deal with the U.S. Justice Department. The deal saw him being found guilty on one federal charge in exchange for his release back to Australia.

China's Chang'e 6 lunar exploration mission to collect moon rock successfully landed on the far side of



the Moon. Later in the month, the probe successfully landed back to Earth with rock and soil samples onboard.

The German government agreed on legislation to expedite the deportation of individuals who post or 'like' social media content that celebrates or



promotes terrorist activities.

The Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko became the first human to spend 1,000 days in outer space.

June Sports Review

Real Madrid won a record 15th



Champions League championship after beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 in the final at Wembley Stadium in London, England.

Iga Swiatek beat Jasmine Paolini to win the French Open tennis singles title. The Pole beat her opponent



6-2, 6-1 to become the third woman to win three consecutive titles in the Open Era. On the men's side of the draw, the Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz beat Alexander Zverev 6-3, 2-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2. The win was the 21-year-old's third grand slam title.

In basketball, the Boston Celtics beat the Dallas Mavericks in five games in the NBA Finals. The Celtics surpass the Los Angeles Lakers to become the team with the most NBA championships after winning their 18th overall.

End

UK & United States announce partnership on science of AI safety

April

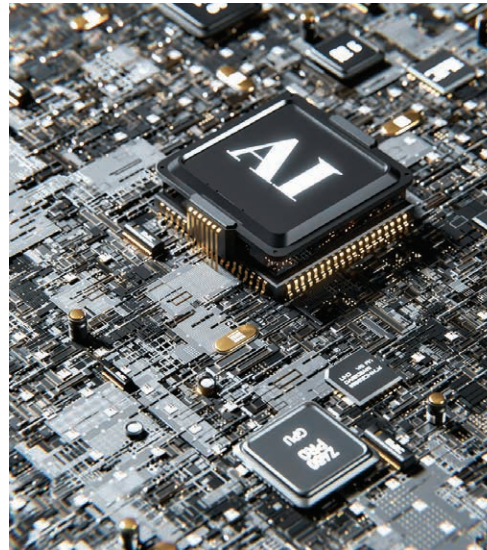
From: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, AI Safety Institute and The Rt Hon Michelle Donelan

- UK and US AI Safety Institutes to work seamlessly with each other, partnering on research, safety evaluations, and guidance for AI safety
- Institutes to develop shared capabilities through information-sharing, close cooperation, and expert personnel exchanges

The UK and US have signed (Monday 1 April 2024) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will see them work together to develop tests for the most advanced artificial intelligence (AI) models, following through on commitments made at the AI Safety Summit last November.

Signed by Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan and US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, the partnership will

see both countries working to align their scientific approaches and working closely to accelerate and rapidly iterate robust suites of evaluations for AI models, systems, and agents.



The UK and US AI Safety Institutes have laid out plans to build a common approach to AI safety testing and to share their capabilities to ensure these risks can be tackled effectively. They intend to perform at least one joint testing exercise on a publicly accessible model. They also intend to tap into a collective pool of expertise by exploring personnel exchanges between the Institutes.

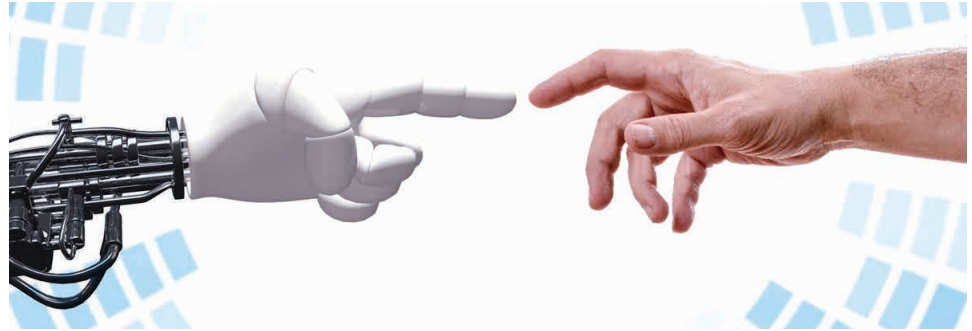
The partnership will take effect immediately and is intended to allow both organisations to work seamlessly with one another. AI continues to develop rapidly, and both governments recognise the need to act now to ensure a shared approach to AI safety which can keep pace with the technology's emerging risks. As the countries strengthen their partnership on AI safety, they have also committed to develop similar partnerships with other countries to promote AI safety across the globe.

UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology, Michelle Donelan said:

“This agreement represents a landmark moment, as the UK and the United States deepen our enduring special relationship to address the defining technology challenge of our generation.

We have always been clear that ensuring the safe development of AI is a shared global issue. Only by working together can we address the technology’s risks head on and harness its enormous potential to help us all live easier and healthier lives.

The work of our two nations in driving forward AI safety will strengthen the foundations we laid at Bletchley Park in November, and I have no doubt that our shared expertise will continue to pave



the way for countries tapping into AI’s enormous benefits safely and responsibly.”

United States Secretary of Commerce, Gina Raimondo said:

“AI is the defining technology of our generation. This partnership is going to accelerate both of our Institutes’ work across the full spectrum of risks, whether to our national security or to our broader society. Our partnership makes clear that we aren’t running away from these concerns – we’re running at them. Because of our collaboration, our Institutes will gain a better understanding of AI systems, conduct more robust evaluations, and issue more rigorous guidance.

By working together, we are furthering the long-lasting special relationship

between the U.S. and UK and laying the groundwork to ensure that we’re keeping AI safe both now and in the future.”

The UK and the United States have always been clear that ensuring the safe development of AI is a shared global issue. Reflecting the importance of ongoing international collaboration, today’s announcement will also see both countries sharing vital information about the capabilities and risks associated with AI models and systems, as well as fundamental technical research on AI safety and security. This will work to underpin a common approach to AI safety testing, allowing researchers on both sides of the Atlantic—and around the world—to coalesce around a common scientific foundation.

UK Space Agency announces new office in Wales

April

From: Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, UK Space Agency and The Rt Hon David TC Davies

The UK Space Agency is opening an office in Wales for the first time as it works to support the space sector across the UK.

Aligned with the government's Levelling Up strategy, the expansion will enable the Agency to collaborate more closely with the UK's thriving space sector, while promoting regional skills and job opportunities to deliver increasingly

ambitious missions and capabilities.

The most recent figures show the Welsh space sector generates £79 million in income a year and employs over 600 people.

The new office at William Morgan House in Cardiff, is part of a number of changes for the UK Space Agency, which will also open offices in Edinburgh and Leicester and new headquarters at the Harwell Space Cluster in Oxfordshire.

Dr Paul Bate, CEO of the UK Space

Agency, said:

"This is a transformational moment for the UK Space Agency, responding directly to the feedback that the Agency should be embedded in the sector. Our new headquarters, located at the UK's biggest space cluster in Harwell, will connect to regional offices in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Leicester, helping us recruit space talent from across the nation and deliver the National Space Strategy.

Wales has a long-established heritage in aerospace and manufacturing, and in recent years we have supported Welsh space companies to develop new and innovative technologies, including Space Forge who built Wales's first satellite.

We have seen a significant rise in space organisations across the Welsh space ecosystem and it's crucial we



nurture their skills and expertise, and connect them with the wider sector, to ensure we continue this journey.”

The UK Space Agency is supporting Space Wales to build the Welsh Space Cluster, which includes recently appointing a Welsh Cluster Development Manager.

Last year space research, manufacturing and testing facilities in Wales received a boost thanks to the UK Space Agency’ funding.

Almost £8 million went to Cardiff-based Space Forge for a National Microgravity Research Centre, for advanced material research and production. Snowdonia LLP received £800,000 to develop the Space Technology Test Centre (STTC) at the Snowdonia Space Centre, Llanbedr, Gwynedd, in partnership with Newton Launch Systems Ltd.



In addition, £10.7 million of UK Space Agency funding went to a team, led by the University of Aberystwyth, to replace a Russian-made instrument on the Rosalind Franklin rover, with the aim of launching to Mars in 2028.

Welsh Secretary David TC Davies said:

“I’m delighted that the UK Space Agency is opening an office in Cardiff to support the fast-growing space sector in Wales. The UK Government has made significant investments in companies like Space Forge in Cardiff, and in research programmes at Welsh universities. We have built talent and expertise and it’s great to see support coming to Wales to help the sector grow and develop.”

John Whalley, CEO of Space Wales, said:

“The opening of the UK Space Agency’s office in Cardiff marks a transformative opportunity for the Welsh space sector. With over 85 space-related organisations across the nation, this not only acts as an opportunity to amplify our successes but also ignite further partnerships with the UK Space Agency to launch the Welsh space sector to new heights.”

The UK Space Agency’s new structure

will create significant opportunities to build on high-growth areas, such as Earth observation and satellite broadband. It will also help the UK establish early leadership in emerging markets such as in-orbit spacecraft servicing, active space debris removal, and the new lunar economy, enabling us to help forge a greener, smarter and more inclusive sector.

As set out in the Space Industrial Plan, the government is committed to continuing its support for space clusters across the UK and providing the tools needed to drive collaboration between them and catalyse further investment.

The Agency will retain offices in London and Swindon.



Government rewards workers with record tax cut for 29 million

April

From: HM Treasury, The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP and The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Government rewards hard work with record tax cut to National Insurance for 29 million workers

29 million workers receive largest ever cut to National Insurance

- Government is sticking to its economic plan and rewarding hard work in this month's pay packet, with over £900 a year boost for typical worker
- Signals government's long-term ambition to end unfair double tax on work

29 million Brits will see their hard work rewarded from tomorrow (6 April), as record tax cuts come into full force.

Since Autumn 2023, National Insurance Contributions (NICs) for workers have been slashed by a third - the largest cut

to NICs in history - with a longer-term ambition to end the unfair double tax on work and abolish employee and self-employed NICs altogether.

Since January, the main rate of employee National Insurance has been cut for 27 million workers from 12% to 8%, saving the average employee on £35,400 over £900 a year.

Over 2 million self-employed people will benefit from the main rate of Class 4 NICs being cut from 9% to 6% alongside the abolition of the requirement to pay Class 2 NICs - simplifying the tax system and saving an average self-employed person



on £28,000 over £650 a year.

These cuts are possible because the economy is turning a corner, thanks to the government's decisive action to bring inflation down from 11.1% to 3.4% and ensure borrowing costs start to fall. Because of this progress, the government can now cut taxes to reward work and grow the economy.

The tax cuts – worth £20 billion a year – mean that those individuals on average salaries will now pay less in personal taxes than they would in any other G7 country.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said:

Hard work is one of my core values, and the progress we have made on the economy means we can reward work with a tax cut worth £900 for the average earner.

This marks the next step in our plan to

end the unfairness of double taxation of work by abolishing National Insurance in the long term.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, said:

The record tax cuts taking effect tomorrow show our economic plan is working – because of the progress we’ve made we’re putting hundreds of pounds a year back into the pockets of working people across the country.

It shows we stand behind those who work hard and fires the starting gun on our long-term ambition to end the unfair double tax on work.

The tax cuts will also help grow the economy by bringing more people into the labour market. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expects that, as a result of these combined cuts, total hours worked will increase by the equivalent of almost 200,000 full-time workers by 2028-29.

To mark the record cuts to NICs, HMRC has launched an updated online tool to help people understand how much they personally could save in National Insurance this year.

They come into effect on the same day as an increase to the income threshold at which the High Income Child Benefit Charge (HICBC) starts - from £50,000 to £60,000 - taking 170,000 families out of paying the charge altogether.

The rate at which the HICBC is charged will also be halved from 1% of the Child Benefit payment for every additional £100 earned above the threshold, to 1% for every £200, meaning Child Benefit will not be withdrawn in full until individuals earn £80,000 or higher. As a result of these changes, 485,000 hard-working families will gain an average of £1,260 towards the costs of raising their children in 2024/25.

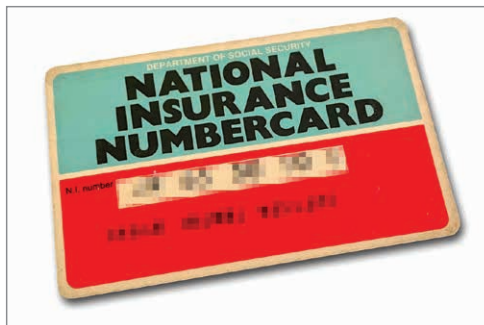
The government has also committed to consulting in due course on administering the HICBC on a household basis by April 2026, in recognition of how charging on an individual basis can sometimes lead to

unfair outcomes, in particular for single parents and single earner families.

These changes to support hard-working families follow a raft of measures that came into force on 1 April that could save households up to £3,850 a year on average to help those struggling with cost-of-living while igniting the economy.

This includes a record increase in the National Living Wage from £10.42 an hour to £11.44, and a 12.3% drop in energy bills from the previous quarter. In addition, households can benefit from a separate increase to the Local Housing Allowance that will mean some of the poorest families on either Universal Credit or Housing Benefit will gain £800 a year on average.

And on Monday 8 April, the government will stand by its commitment to maintain the Triple Lock by raising the full basic State Pension by 8.5% to almost £170 a week, after the largest ever cash increase last year. Changes like the introduction of the Triple Lock and new State Pension have meant pensioners are on average £1,000 better off than in 2010, according to the Resolution Foundation.



£4.65 million for bus operators to help disabled passengers travel with confidence

April

From: Department for Transport and Guy Opperman

New funding will support upgrades to buses to provide real-time travel information to passengers.

- government funding will help small bus operators roll out live audio and visual updates on routes
- builds on millions of pounds already invested by the government to improve transport accessibility
- new one-stop shop guide of helpful advice for disabled passengers using public transport across the UK

Disabled passengers are set to navigate buses with greater ease, thanks to almost £5 million being made available to roll out audible and visual announcements throughout Great Britain.

In the latest of a string of initiatives to

improve accessibility across public transport, applications have today (8 April 2024) opened for small bus and coach operators to bid for a share of £4.65 million to install state-of-the-art technology that will both display and announce information clearly for all passengers, including those with sight and hearing impairments.



Known as the Accessible Information Grant, this funding will be vital in supporting small operators to fit screens, speakers and induction loops guaranteeing passengers are informed about which route they are on and what stop they are at throughout their journey.

The grant applications support regulations that were introduced last year requiring all bus operators to provide audio and visual updates on journeys, and follow £350 million announced last year to improve accessibility at train stations thanks to reallocated HS2 funding.

Guy Opperman, Minister for Accessibility and Ministerial Disability Champion at the Department for Transport, said:

“Buses are the most used form of public transport in the country, and for people who are disabled, they may be the

only way to meet friends and family, attend medical appointments or get to work.

I can only imagine how daunting it must be to get on a bus and not know for certain where it's going or when to get off, which is why we introduced new rules to ensure all buses provide this information in an accessible way. This £4.65 million is the extra push to give operators the tools to upgrade their buses on time and ensure all passengers can board with confidence.”

Last year, regulations were introduced requiring all bus operators throughout Great Britain to provide high-quality and accessible announcements across their networks to ensure disabled people are not left in the dark when it comes to using our public transport. By supporting smaller bus companies, this funding will help ensure that all operators are able to meet that October 2026 deadline.

Pete Osborne, Deputy CEO at Guide Dogs, said:

“Accessible buses can unlock opportunities to get around independently, whether that’s to travel to work, go shopping or see friends. But for many people with sight loss, bus travel has been difficult or impossible because of a lack of audio next stop and final destination announcements.

After years of campaigning, we were delighted with the new regulations announcement last year and we greatly welcome the opening of these grants. AV announcements on buses will be a significant step forward in creating a more inclusive and accessible transport network, helping people live the lives they choose.”

This comes as the government, alongside charity Scope, has published the Right to Ride guide which helps disabled people and others with reduced mobility when using bus, coach, taxi, private hire vehicle and rail services by compiling helpful travel information together in one easy-to-read document.



Right to Ride explains the actions a disabled person can take when a journey has been disrupted or the assistance provided is unsatisfactory or has failed, providing guidance on:

- the rights of disabled passengers travelling across Great Britain
- what to expect in terms of assistance
- what to expect in terms of accessibility
- how to make a complaint if travel does not go as planned
- how to claim compensation or redress

Mark Hodgkinson, Chief Executive at disability equality charity Scope, said:

“Disabled people have been campaigning for many years to make public transport more accessible.

We know that disabled passengers are often let down by poor customer service, inaccessible transport and a lack of up-to-date information. When things go wrong it can often have a big impact and be hard to know what your rights are to put things right.

The Right to Ride document is a significant step forward in providing disabled people with more clarity and transparency over their rights and what to expect when travelling on public transport.

We want transport companies to listen to their disabled customers and make travel more accessible for all.”

This guide is a positive step forward in helping disabled people know their rights and how to find assistance across land modes of transport, set out as a priority in the Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS).

This follows on from a number of initiatives to improve accessibility across transport, including funding step-free access at over 240 train stations through our Access for All programme, as well as the further £350 million to come.

The government has also committed to publishing a National Rail accessibility strategy, announced plans to strengthen air passenger rights for disabled passengers, released new training on handling powered wheelchairs on aircraft and the Air passenger travel guide.

The department also runs the it's everyone's journey campaign, a government-backed initiative to highlight the part we can all play in improving disabled people's experiences when using public transport. This is all on top of the Disability Action Plan which sets out the immediate actions the government will take in 2024 to improve disabled people's everyday lives and lays the foundations for longer-term change.

MPs to vote on landmark bill to create smoke free generation

April

From: Department of Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom and The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP

MPs will vote today (16 April 2024) on world-leading legislation to protect future generations across the UK from the harmful effects of smoking.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill would make it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born after 1 January 2009 - children aged 15 or younger today. Smoking itself would not be criminalised and anyone who can legally buy tobacco today will never be prevented from doing so in the future by the legislation. If passed, the bill will progress to the next stage, bringing the UK closer to creating the first smoke free generation.

Responsible for around 80,000 deaths annually, smoking is the UK's single biggest preventable killer and costs the NHS and economy an estimated £17

billion a year - far more than the £10 billion annual revenue from tobacco taxation.

It is also highly addictive - 4 in 5 smokers start before the age of 20 and remain addicted for the rest of their lives despite most smokers having tried to quit.

The legislation will cover all tobacco products, recognising that tobacco kills two-thirds of long-term users. In England alone, almost every



minute someone with a smoking-related condition is admitted to hospital.

The bill will help deliver the Prime Minister's commitment of creating a smoke free generation, which could prevent over 470,000 cases of heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and other deadly diseases by the turn of the century.

Alongside action to prevent creating future smokers, the government has already announced significant additional funding for stop smoking services over the next 5 years, effectively doubling the money available for local initiatives that can help existing smokers to quit. The government is also rolling out an innovative financial incentives scheme to help all pregnant smokers to quit.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Victoria Atkins, said:

“Too many people know someone whose life has been tragically cut short or irreversibly changed because of smoking, which despite significant progress remains the UK's biggest preventable killer.

The truth is that there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. It is uniquely

harmful and that is why we are taking this important action today to protect the next generation.

This bill will save thousands of lives, ease the strain on our NHS and improve the UK's productivity.”

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill would also give the government new powers to tackle youth vaping by restricting flavours and regulating the way that vapes are sold and packaged to make them less appealing to children.

While vaping can play a useful role in helping adult smokers to quit, non-smokers and children should never vape. The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown and the nicotine contained within them can be highly addictive.

To ensure compliance with the new rules,



trading standards officers will be given new powers to issue on-the-spot fines (fixed penalty notices) to retailers unlawfully selling tobacco or vapes to children. All the money raised would be used to fund further enforcement action.

The bill follows the government's previously stated commitment to ban the sale and supply of disposable vapes under existing environmental legislation, which have been a key factor behind the rise in youth vaping. The ban is planned to take effect from April 2025.

Public Health Minister, Andrea Leadsom, said:

“Smoking is the number one preventable cause of disability, ill health and death in this country. Once it becomes a habit, its addictive nature means that it is extremely difficult to stop.

Because the case against these harmful products is so strong, it's not surprising that the majority of the British public - including those who smoke and those who sell tobacco - support plans to protect the next generation from the misery of

smoking.

Our plan will save lives, ease the strain on our NHS and ensure a brighter future for our children.”

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England, said:

“Smoking kills and causes harm at all stages of life from stillbirths, asthma in children, stroke, cancer to heart attacks and dementia.

This bill, if passed, will have a substantial impact - preventing disease, disability and premature deaths long into the future.”

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), said:

“The Tobacco and Vapes Bill being voted on today is radical but, hard as it is now to believe, so were the smoke free laws when they were put before Parliament. Parliamentarians can be reassured that the public they represent back the bill.

New research just published by ASH shows that the majority of tobacco retailers and the public, including smokers, support the legislation and the smoke free generation ambition

it is designed to deliver. This historic legislation will consign smoking to the ‘ash heap of history.’”

Dr Charmaine Griffiths, Chief Executive at the British Heart Foundation, said:

“Smoking continues to devastate the nation’s health, taking 15,000 UK lives every single year due to cardiovascular disease alone.

Raising the age of sale for tobacco each year will be a game changer, meaning that future generations are protected from serious disease and death caused by smoking.

Decisive action is needed to end this ongoing public health tragedy - we urge every MP to vote for this landmark legislation at the bill’s second reading.”

Professor Steve Turner, Royal College for Paediatrics and Child Health President, said:

“Without a doubt the introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill will save lives.

By stopping children and young people from becoming addicted to nicotine and tobacco we decrease their chances of developing preventable diseases later in

life, and will protect children from the harms of nicotine addiction.

As paediatricians, we strongly urge MPs to use the important responsibility they have and support this bill to protect children’s and our nation’s current and future health.”

Dr Ian Walker, Executive Director of Policy at Cancer Research UK, said:

“Today’s vote is a critical step towards the UK becoming a world leader in tobacco control. By voting in favour of the age of sale legislation, MPs will be putting us on the right side of history, and helping to create the first ever smoke free generation.

Smoking is still the leading cause of cancer in the UK. Now is the time to take action, end cancers caused by smoking and save lives.”



PM to overhaul benefits system and tackle Britain's "sick note culture" in welfare reform speech

April

From: Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

- PM to announce plans to overhaul benefits system to ensure people who are fit to work aren't left behind on benefits
- Fit note system to be reviewed after 11 million fit notes issued last year with 94% written off as unfit to work
- Comes amid unprecedented rise in inactivity due to long term sickness with latest figures showing almost a third of working age adults are inactive

The Prime Minister's new plan for welfare will end Britain's "sick note culture", which has resulted in a significant rise in people being unnecessarily written off work and parked on welfare.

It comes amid concerns that the fit note system has opened the floodgates for

millions of people to be written off work and into welfare without getting the right support and treatment they might need to help them stay in work.

Data recently published by the NHS shows almost 11 million fit notes were issued last year, with an overwhelming 94% of those signed "not fit for work". A large proportion of these are repeat fit notes which are issued without any advice, resulting in a missed opportunity to help people get the appropriate

support they may need to remain in work.

To address this, the Prime Minister announced a review of the fit note system to stop people being written off as "not fit for work" by default and instead design a new system where each fit note conversation focuses on what people can do with the right support in place, rather than what they can't do.

As part of this, the government will consider shifting the responsibility for issuing the fit note away from already stretched GPs, towards specialist work and health professionals who have the dedicated time and expertise to provide an objective assessment of someone's ability to work and the tailored support they may need.

A call for evidence will be published later today to seek responses from a



diverse range of perspectives, including those with lived experiences, healthcare professionals and employers, both on how the current process works and how it can better support people with health conditions to start, stay, and succeed in work.

The Prime Minister said:

“We don’t just need to change the sick note, we need to change the sick note culture so the default becomes what work



you can do – not what you can’t.

“Building on the pilots we’ve already started we’re going to design a new system where people have easy and rapid access to specialised work and health support to help them back to work from the very first Fit Note conversation.

“We’re also going to test shifting the responsibility for assessment from GPs and giving it to specialist work and health professionals who have the dedicated time to provide an objective assessment of someone’s ability to work and the tailored support they need to do so.”

Setting out his vision for a “new welfare settlement for Britain”, the Prime Minister outlined the new challenges that have emerged since the pandemic particularly the unprecedented rise in inactivity and how the government plans to tackle them.

Before the pandemic, we had the second lowest inactivity rate in the G7, lower than France, Germany, Italy, USA and Canada. But since the pandemic, a significant number of working aged people have become inactive due to long term sickness which has in large part been driven by mental health conditions.

Latest figures from the Office for

National Statistics suggest there are currently 2.8 million people who are ‘economically inactive’ due to long-term sickness, a near-record high. Of those inactive due to long term sickness at the start of last year, 53% reported that they had depression, bad nerves or anxiety.

This is also driving an unsustainable increase in welfare spending as more people claiming disability benefits are now assessed as having anxiety or depression as their main condition.

Since the pandemic, total spending on working age disability and ill-health benefits increased by almost two-thirds from £42.3 billion to £69 billion and we now spend more on these benefits than our core schools’ budget or on policing.

The fit note process is often the first step to someone falling out of work and acts as a gateway towards some ill health and disability benefit assessments. There is also clear evidence that the longer someone is out of work, the lower the likelihood that they return to work – further exacerbating the rise in inactivity.

The Prime Minister made the case

that we need to be more ambitious about how we help people, particularly with mental health conditions, back into work and ensure they are not left behind on the benefits system.

The Prime Minister also said:

“We should see it as a sign of progress that people can talk openly about mental health conditions in a way that only a few years ago would’ve been unthinkable, and I will never dismiss or downplay the illnesses people have.

“But just as it would be wrong to dismiss this growing trend, so it would be wrong merely to sit back and accept it because it’s too hard; or too controversial; or for fear of causing offence. Doing so, would let down many of the people our welfare system was designed to help.

“Because if you believe as I do, that work gives you the chance not just to earn but to contribute, to belong, to overcome feelings of loneliness and social isolation and if you believe, as I do, the growing body of evidence that good work can actually improve mental and physical health...

“...then it becomes clear: we need to be more ambitious about helping people

back to work and more honest about the risk of over-medicalising the everyday challenges and worries of life.”

Today’s fit note review builds on the significant steps we’ve taken so far to break down barriers to work and tackle inactivity. This includes through our £2.5 billion Back to Work Plan which is already helping over a million people, including those with mental health conditions, break down barriers to work by expanding access to mental health services and putting an additional 384,000 people through NHS Talking Therapies.

The new WorkWell pilot is also being rolled out and will support almost 60,000 long-term sick or disabled people to start, stay and succeed in work once it has



gone live in approximately 15 areas across England.

The WorkWell services provides a single, joined-up assessment and gateway into local employment support services, to help people manage their health conditions and get back to work sooner. This is part of an ambitious programme to support disabled people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work.

We are also testing reforms of the fit note process to integrate it more closely with WorkWell, enabling the people who need it to have a work and health conversation, with a single, joined-up assessment and gateway into local employment support services. It will also complement the role of Occupational Health in ensuring employers understand and benefit from more expert work and health support to retain and support those in work.

The fit note call for evidence is part of five key reforms the Prime Minister outlined in his speech to put work at the heart of welfare and modernise the welfare system to ensure it is fit for the future.



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Rare birds shake their tail feathers in flamboyant mating dance on MOD firing range

May

From: Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Black grouse birds are taking to the firing range at Garelochhead Training Centre in Scotland, where the short grassland offers an ideal location for the males to get their groove on with a unique mating dance called the 'lek'.

From dawn, the 'rookoo' sound of the iconic Scottish birds can be heard echoing through Garelochhead Training Centre and the surrounding uplands. With their distinctive red eyebrows and white under-tail feathers, the birds are a special sight for local birdwatchers and military personnel alike.

The males come onto the short grass areas at dawn and dusk to attract females watching from the longer grass nearby, as well as engaging in the occasional spirited scuffle with rivals.

The firing range, which sees personnel taking aim at targets from various distances, is a carefully-mown area of grass maintained by DIO's industry partner Landmarc Support Services (Landmarc). It not only provides an ideal environment for live fire training, but has also proved an attractive habitat for black grouse.

Despite finding a haven at Garelochhead, the black grouse is one of the fastest declining birds in the UK, and is on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened

Species. Driven by climate change and differences in land management, the birds have been moving further north as their favourite upland heathland habitats become scarcer. Their adoption of the Garelochhead range is a positive step for black grouse conservation in the region.

Lottie Birch, DIO Ecologist (Scotland and Northern Ireland) said:

"Protecting the environment and supporting nature recovery is a vital part of DIO's role in managing the UK



Defence Training Estate.

Like many of our Scottish sites, Garelochhead Training Centre is an area of unique natural beauty and rich ecological diversity. While on first impression a military firing range might seem an unlikely habitat for wildlife, it's no exaggeration to say that Garelochhead hosts the best black grouse dance floor in central Scotland!

Through continued collaboration between DIO, Landmarc, and regional conservationists, we will continue to protect and conserve the diverse range of species that call the site home, while supporting military training activities."

To gain a detailed understanding of the various bird species across the training area, DIO and Landmarc commissioned a survey of breeding birds at Garelochhead Training Centre in 2023. It was conducted by John Simpson, a former MOD Police officer specialising in wildlife crime, who today works as a full-time ornithologist with Wild Caledonia Wildlife Surveys. The survey forms part of DIO's ongoing environmental monitoring of Defence landholdings in Scotland.

In total, over 70 species were recorded during the survey, of which 48 species

are believed to be breeding. The data from the survey – including the birds' conservation status, habitat requirements and land management requirements – is being used by DIO's ecologists to help protect and maintain habitats across the training area, in careful balance with the site's military training activities.

Bird species recorded at Garelochhead Training Centre include the osprey; sparrowhawk; Eurasian curlew; whinchat; grasshopper warbler and peregrine falcon, as well as several species of owl.

The Earl of Minto, Minister of State for Defence, said:

"It is wonderful that we are protecting this iconic Scottish bird while supporting our Armed Forces' essential training



activities. From feathers to firearms, up and down the nation we are conserving diverse habitats on our training estate while keeping the UK safe."

John Simpson, ornithologist, Wild Caledonia Wildlife Surveys said:

"After conducting a breeding bird survey for DIO and Landmarc, it soon became apparent that Garelochhead Training Centre is an exceptional site for nature.

The diversity and population density of many species, some of which are of conservation concern, is superb. The survey has led to a collaborative and coordinated approach to land management in balance with military training activity.

DIO's Defence Training Estate and ecology teams, along with regional conservationists, work together proactively at Garelochhead, balancing the needs of conservation with national defence requirements. The range provides a wonderful black grouse lekking area, and coordinated action ensures that areas are protected to give the best chance of nesting success."

Space sustainability conference kicks off with £1.8 million for tech innovation

May

From: UK Space Agency

New funding from the UK Space Agency is backing technologies to help satellites measure our changing shorelines, estimate levels of biomass, predict weather forecasting, and manufacture medicines in space.

The £1.8 million injection, divided across nine individual projects, rounds

off the final phase of the Agency's Enabling Technologies Programme (ETP), designed to give a boost to British organisations with promising technologies to support the delivery of new space capabilities.

The funding is being announced on the opening day of the UK's first In-Orbit Servicing and Manufacturing (IOSM) conference on the Harwell Science Campus.

IOSM is a crucial emerging technology that supports space sustainability by enabling spacecraft to be repaired and adjusted during flight. It also opens new possibilities for building products that we need on Earth, such as semiconductors, much more efficiently in the microgravity environment.

Andrew Griffith MP, Minister for Space at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, said:

“From more accurate weather forecasts to manufacturing medicines on a bigger scale, ambitious UK space teams from Strathclyde to Surrey are developing pioneering solutions in space to enhance our life on earth.

This £1.8 million government fund will grow our economy through new innovation while helping to keep space sustainable and deliver more key discoveries for many years to come.”

The IOSM conference is an opportunity for the UK sector to showcase initiatives that are making space activity more sustainable. The UK Space Agency will launch a new package of IOSM initiatives, including a funding call for the next phase of the UK's national Active Debris Removal (ADR) mission, to derisk technologies developed in two mission studies led



by Astroscale and ClearSpace.

The UK Space Agency is also backing new research studies on the size and health of the IOSM market and the UK's current capabilities, and has awarded the University of Southampton a project to assess the potential impact of satellites burning up in Earth's atmosphere, known as ablation. This follows the recent announcement of a £2 million upgrade to the Satellite Applications Catapult's IOSM facility in Westcott, to support British companies with testing and demonstration of new innovations.

Enabling Technologies Programme (ETP)

The ETP projects announced today include work by the University of Derby to develop a material bonding method for use in the space environment, which could help assemble large space structures in orbit, and one by Messium to enhance algorithms and imagery required to estimate quantities of above ground organic matter, with a particular focus on wheat.

Another by the University of Northumbria in Newcastle will develop a personalised tourniquet system for astronaut blood flow exercises, while Frontier Space

Technologies will take the next step in creating its SpaceLab, a miniature "lab in a box" capable of manufacturing high-value pharmaceuticals and science materials.

Dr Paul Bate, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

"From using satellite observations to gain a clearer picture of the way our planet is changing, to using the in-orbit environment itself to develop vital tech products more efficiently, space is central to how we can plan for a safer and more sustainable future on Earth.

For almost two years, our Enabling Technologies Programme has been empowering scientists and engineers in universities, companies and research institutes to advance the technologies of tomorrow, demonstrating the UK Space Agency's commitment to harnessing the



power of space to improve life for everybody."

Launched in September 2022 in partnership with the UKRI Science and Technology Facilities Council, the £8.6 million programme has already supported 41 emerging and disruptive technologies that will drive growth in the UK space sector.

The Enabling Technologies Programme has now been incorporated into the National Space Innovation Programme (NSIP) and will be delivered as NSIP Kick Starter.

The projects

ARGANS (£250,000) – Global shorelines capability

An Earth observation satellite applications project, aiming to map global coastline trends, especially for regions of the world with limited geospatial information, enabling generation of accurate shorelines. Potential uses include climate change monitoring and coastal management planning.

University of Derby (£150,000) – ASTRIA computational study for manufacturing, assembly and

materials

Application and development of a material bonding method (transient liquid phase diffusion bonding) in a space environment, which can be applied to concepts such as assembly of large space structures or vehicle re-entry.

Messium (£120,000) – Wheat biomass estimator

An Earth observation satellite applications project using research driven algorithms and hyperspectral imagery to estimate above ground biomass in a remote, cost-effective and scalable way.

Ultima Forma Ltd (£120,000) – Electroformed modular Q-band waveguide assemblies

In collaboration with Airbus Defence and Space, developing modular waveguides in Q&V-band by electroforming. Waveguides are key technologies in communications, directing energy in

a particular direction. Electroforming involves “growing” metal via electrolytic transfer of ions, potentially delivering a cost-effective manufacture and development technique.

Imperial College London (£250,000) – Space applications of nitrogen vacancy-in-diamond magnetometer

In partnership with University of Warwick, development of magnetometers using nitrogen vacancy centre in diamond, potentially offering a competitive alternative to traditional fluxgate sensors. Magnetometers are devices used to measure the magnetic field, with applications ranging from planetary science missions to weather forecasting here on Earth.

Surrey Space Centre, University of Surrey (£250,000) – Enabling ultra-low orbits: air breathing electric propulsion spacecraft

Development of a spacecraft platform capable of flying in extremely low altitude orbits, advancing the air breathing electric propulsion concept through propulsion testing, orbital mechanics simulation and aerodynamic analysis for use in Earth observation, telecommunications, and climate monitoring.

University of Northumbria at

Newcastle (£140,000) – Personalised tourniquet system for spaceflight technology

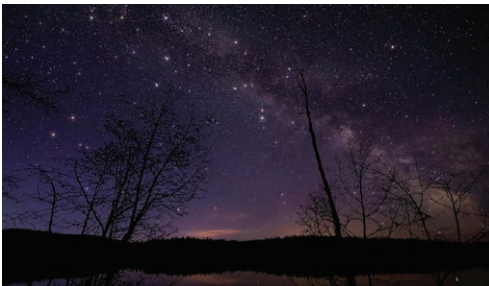
Development of a personalised tourniquet system for spaceflight, a critical enabling technology for human spaceflight in low Earth orbit and beyond to perform a blood flow restriction exercise countermeasure in space.

University of Strathclyde (£250,000) – Tuneable radiation-resilient (AlGa)2O3 UVC photodetectors

Development and demonstration of suitability for space of a new type of semiconductor, providing an alternative to current Silicon-based UVC photodetectors.

Frontier Space Technologies Ltd (£250,000) - Fluidic, electrical connectivity, and biocompatibility upgrade studies for the SpaceLab microgravity laboratory

Development of the fluid transfer and biological material property testing of SpaceLab, a miniaturised, autonomous lab-in-a-box designed for in-orbit manufacturing of high-value products. Applications include pharmaceuticals, biosciences and material science.



The Thames Barrier – protecting London and the Thames Estuary for 40 years

May

From: Environment Agency

Duran Duran at number one, Sweden shocks Eurovision with Diggi-Loo Diggi-Ley, the Apple Macintosh goes on sale in the UK and the late Queen officially opens the Thames Barrier in East London.

Today (Wednesday 8 May 2024) marks the fortieth anniversary of the garlanded opening ceremony for the Thames Barrier, one of the largest movable barriers in the world. It continues to provide vital and reliable protection from flooding to the nation's capital to this day.

Operated and maintained by the Environment Agency, the Thames Barrier and the other flood defences across the wider estuary protect 125 square kilometres of central London, encompassing 1.42 million people, four World Heritage sites, more than 4,000 listed buildings, 711 healthcare sites, 116 railway and tube stations and more than 300km of major roads. The value of

residential property protected stands at £321 billion.

Without the barrier, storm surges and frequent tidal flooding of the Thames would submerge buildings along the river as well as the underground, wrecking properties and livelihoods and causing billions of pounds worth of devastating damage.

In its 40 years, the barrier has closed 221 times for flood defence purposes, underlining its importance to helping London thrive.

The original design life was only to 2030, but due to the excellent design and build, the Thames Barrier will continue to protect London until 2070.

The Thames Barrier's future is encapsulated in the Thames Estuary 2100 plan, updated last year. This sets out how flood risk will be managed in the Thames estuary to the end of the century and

beyond from both the existing risks faced from tidal flooding, as well as the growing risks that climate change will bring.

To ensure the capital is protected over the longer term, the Environment Agency is committed to working with partners to review and decide on an end-of-century option by 2040.

The fortieth anniversary of the Barrier also marks the Thames Barrier's Manager's final day. Andy Batchelor will step down following 25 years in the post. Andy's career will always be intertwined with the Thames Barrier, as he began his first job in construction building the associated flood defences where he watched the Barrier being built and started a new job at the Barrier on the same day it was opened by the Queen and he has remained there ever since.

Andy will continue in his role as Chair

of the Delivery Board of I-STORM, the international network of storm surge barriers he co-founded in 2006 to connect specialists around the world.

Andy Batchelor, Thames Tidal Defences Operations Manager, said:

Having witnessed and worked on the Thames Barrier's opening, I am immensely proud of the protection it has provided London for the past 40 years and will continue to provide for years to come.

Its reliability and effectiveness demonstrate the sophistication of its design by a very talented group of engineers and the continued maintenance and operation carried out by the Barrier team.

However, we will not rest on our laurels given the threat of rising sea levels, which is why we have committed to working with partners to review and decide on an end-of-century option by 2040 in our Thames Estuary 2100 Plan, to ensure the capital is protected over the longer term.

Caroline Douglass, Executive Director for Flood and Coastal Risk Management at the Environment Agency, said:

The Environment Agency is hugely proud

of the protection provided by the Thames Barrier, which has defended London for more than 40 years and continues to do so now and into the future.

Alongside the invaluable role of the barrier, the approach set out in our Thames Estuary 2100 plan ensures we and our partners take the steps required between now and the end of the century to bolster the capital's resilience to climate change and enable it to continue to thrive, by effectively managing flood risk from rivers and the sea in London.

The Thames Barrier's feted history demonstrates the nation's ingenuity in the face of threat. Following the devastating floods of 1953 where the East Coast was struck by the combination of high spring



tides and high-speed winds, causing the loss of 300 lives, the nation needed a rethink on how to protect London from flooding. Sir Hermann Bondi's report in 1966 concluded that the best solution was to build a flood barrier near Woolwich and raise the banks downstream.

The Greater London Council appointed Rendel, Palmer and Tritton to design the barrier and their designer Charles Draper came up with the idea of 'rising sector gates', inspired by how the taps on his gas cooker worked.

Construction took eight years to complete and cost £535 million (approximately £2.4 billion in today's money). The design sees 10 steel gates that can be raised into position across the River Thames when needed. Once raised, the main gates stand as high as a five-storey building and as wide as the opening of Tower Bridge. Each main gate weighs 3,300 tonnes.

The Thames Barrier saw arguably its finest hour when the UK was battered by devastating storms in the winter of 2013/14. During this period, the Thames experienced its highest tide since the barrier's construction and

it was closed 50 times in 13 weeks. As a consequence of the barrier's operation, no properties in London flooded.

The Environment Agency knows the devastating impact that flooding can have, which is why protecting people and communities is its top priority. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change in the UK and around the world. Urgent action is needed to adapt the impacts of climate emergency at the same time as reducing emissions.

The Environment Agency has a strong track record: its new flood defences meant 314,000 homes were better protected between 2015-2021. Between 2015 and 2020, we have invested more than £1 billion on maintaining flood and coastal defences. This includes investing in developing technology and direct maintenance work such as dredging, inspecting assets, and carrying out repairs.

Between 2021-27, the Government is investing £5.6 billion in creating new flood and coastal defences to better protect hundreds of thousands of properties across England including in London, where the Thames Barrier stands proudly as testament to the Environment Agency's work.

Simpler bin collections for England to boost recycling

May

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

A new, common-sense approach to recycling will make bin day simpler and boost recycling rates for the nation, Recycling Minister Robbie Moore announced today (9 May).

New simpler recycling collections will see the same materials collected from homes, workplaces and schools, ending the confusing patchwork of different approaches across England.

Today the government has set out how the drive to better and simpler recycling will work, listening to councils who want to avoid streets cluttered with bins while doing what is best for the local community. Councils will be allowed to collect plastic, metal, glass, paper and card in one bin in all circumstances. Similarly, food and garden waste will also be allowed to be co-collected.

This will reduce confusion over what items can be recycled, as people will no longer have to check what their specific council will accept for recycling. It will also reduce complexity for councils and other waste collectors, ensuring they retain the flexibility to collect recyclable waste in the most appropriate way for their local areas.

Additionally, the Government is supporting more frequent and comprehensive bin collections. A minimum backstop means councils will be expected to collect black



bin waste at least fortnightly, alongside weekly food waste collections. This will stop the trend – seen outside England – towards three-weekly or four-weekly bin collections. Councils are also being actively encouraged to make collections even more frequent, to prevent smelly waste from building up outside homes.

Together, these new proposals will ensure regular and simpler bin collections from people's homes across England – making recycling simpler for everyone.

Recycling Minister Robbie Moore said:

We all want to do our bit to increase recycling and reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill – but a patchwork of different bin collections across England means it can be hard to know what your council will accept.

Our plans for Simpler Recycling will end that confusion: ensuring that the same set of materials will be collected regardless of where you live.

Paul Vanston, CEO of the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment (INCPEN), said:

Householders can take this government announcement as a pledge that, wherever we live across the nation, our local councils

will all speedily implement recycling collections of the full range of materials that will match on-pack recycling labels citizens rely on for guidance.

Those paying the very substantial costs for councils' local packaging recycling services – especially citizens, brands and retailers – can rightly set high benchmarks of great customer service, superb packaging recycling performance and demonstrable value-for-money being achieved everywhere.

The plans will apply to all homes in England, including flats. Similar measures will apply to non-household municipal premises, including businesses, hospitals, schools and universities.

As well as these developments, the list of premises in scope of these requirements has been expanded. Places of worship, penal institutes, charity shops, hostels and public meeting places will all come under the scope of the Simpler Recycling regulations.

This update builds on wider efforts to increase recycling and reduce waste. New restrictions on single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers came into force on 1 October 2023 in order to reduce plastic

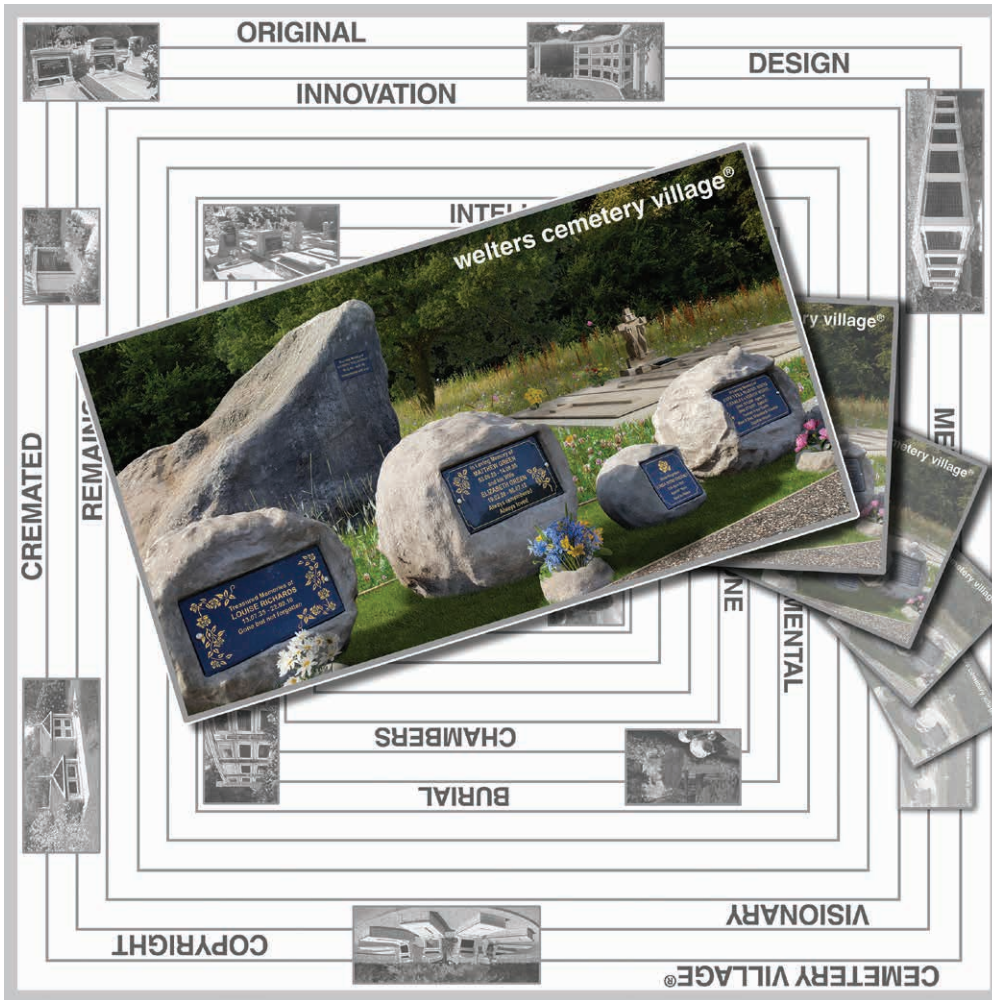
pollution and keep streets clean. We are also moving forward with the implementation of our Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers and our Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging to boost recycling and clamp down on plastic pollution and litter.

At the beginning of 2024 we confirmed that disposable vapes will be banned in the UK to protect children's health and tackle the environmental impact of these items.

We have already introduced a ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, restrictions on the supply of single-use plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds, and our world-leading Plastic Packaging Tax.

Meanwhile, our single-use plastic carrier bag charge has successfully cut sales by over 97% in the main supermarkets.





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350 extra medical school places allocated in NHS training boost

May

From: Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP and The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan

- The government has funded 350 additional medical school places in England for the academic year 2025 to 2026
- This is the next stage in delivering the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan commitment to double medical school places by 2031
- The places have been allocated to medical schools across the country but targeted to address disparities in the distribution of places and support under-doctored areas

The government has allocated an additional 350 medical school places, to deliver the future workforce the NHS requires.

Last year, the NHS set out its Long Term

Workforce Plan, backed by more than £2.4 billion in government funding. It outlines how the NHS will recruit and retain hundreds of thousands more staff over the next 15 years - delivering the biggest training expansion in the health service's history.

One of the key commitments is doubling the number of medical school places in England to 15,000 by 2031 and levelling up the geographic training of places to help tackle unequal access to services.

In the next step to deliver this commitment, the Office for Students (OfS) has now allocated 350 places in the academic year 2025 to 2026 to medical schools across



the country.

Health and Social Care Secretary Victoria Atkins said:

“Thanks to the government’s plan for a faster, simpler and fairer healthcare system, the NHS now has record funding and a record number of doctors.

I want to make sure that we will have the medical professionals we will need in the years ahead.

That’s why we are delivering the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and doubling the number of medical school places, so we can train the next generation of world-class doctors to offer patients the highest-quality care.”

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said:

“Our frontline health workers do

tremendous work in serving the nation every single day and ensuring all of us receive the care we need.

I know what a popular career medicine is among young people and it's so important they have the chance to pursue their ambitions.

With this expansion of places - alongside our new doctor degree apprenticeship - the opportunities for a career in medicine are greater than ever."

Amanda Pritchard, Chief Executive of NHS England, said:

"This is a hugely important moment for the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and marks one of the first steps towards our ambition to train more doctors in England than ever before - the record expansion will help us boost care for patients right across the country.

The ambitious blueprint for our workforce, is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to put NHS staffing on a sustainable footing, particularly as we continue to adapt to new and rising demand for health services."

Dr Katie Petty-Saphon, CEO, Medical Schools Council, said:

"The Medical Schools Council welcomes the announcement of 350 additional student places from 2025.

Medical schools are committed to widening participation to the profession and particularly important is the need for local recruitment in under-doctored areas.

We will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that the NHS has the staff it needs to deliver high-quality patient care."

Places have been provided across the country, but the OFS has used analysis of geographical distribution provided by NHS England to target under-doctored areas in its allocation of the places.

This includes substantial increases to medical schools at universities in Sunderland, Leeds, East Anglia, Anglia Ruskin, Plymouth and Surrey. The University of Surrey is also receiving



government-funded places for the first time.

This is the second year of expansions to deliver the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan. Delivery started a year early, allocating 205 additional medical school places for the 2024 to 2025 academic year, including providing government-funded places to 3 schools for the first time.

This builds on the 25% expansion of medical school places in England that the government completed in 2020, taking the total number of places to 7,500 per year and delivering 5 new medical schools.

A combination of the additional medical places this year and next, along with medical apprenticeship places, puts us on track to exceed current plans.

Through the allocation of places for 2026 to 2027 and beyond, the government and NHS England will work closely with partners including medical schools, NHS trusts and the General Medical Council to deliver ambitious reforms to medical education set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.



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£4 million boost to fight knife crime

May

From: Home Office, The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP and The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP

The investment will see £3.5 million go into the research, development and evaluation of new technologies which can detect knives carried from a distance and hand-held or body-worn systems which can be operated by individual officers.



The government has also confirmed £547,863 funding for the refit and redeployment of four vans into new mobile live facial recognition (LFR) units for the Met Police, to bolster efforts to address knife crime which is rising in the capital. This is part of wider funding which aims to tackle serious violence through hotspot policing.

The investment comes during Sceptre, the national policing intensification week for knife crime led by National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and is just one of a package of measures introduced over the last year to tackle serious violence.

Home Secretary James Cleverly said:

“Knife crime ruins lives and recent tragedies show there’s a lot more to be done to take these dangerous weapons off our streets.

That’s why we’re taking a joint approach

and announcing further measures to tackle these heinous crimes.

No technology can replace the presence of officers on our streets, but as criminals develop new strategies towards crime, so must we.

New technologies are already revolutionising how we fight crime and we are going even further to give police the solutions they need to keep us safe.”

LFR mobile units are used in busy areas to check individuals against a select list of persons who are wanted by the police or the courts. The effectiveness of these units is well proven. In December, deployments of live facial recognition in Croydon led to 15 arrests for offences including rape, robbery, fraud, grievous bodily harm and possession of class A drugs.

These units have clear safeguards in place. The use of LFR is governed by data protection, equality, and human rights laws. It can only be used for a policing purpose, where necessary, proportionate, and fair. Images taken by the tech are deleted instantly if they do not match the list of criminals held by police. All deployments are also targeted, intelligence-led, time-bound, and geographically limited. Before a deployment, the police will inform the public where they intend to use the technology and where they can obtain more information on its use.

Commander Clayman, national knife crime lead at NPCC said:

“Tackling knife crime requires a range of tactics working with our partner organisations and understanding where policing can best add value.

We welcome today’s announcement of additional investment in knife detection technology which is one of the many tools we use to keep our communities safe.”

Laws on knife crime in England and Wales are already among the toughest in the world and this government is going even further. Laws on dangerous objects are kept under constant review and

new evidence has led to the banning of zombie knives in 2016, cyclone knives in 2019, and earlier this year we announced the ban on zombie-style knives and machetes which will come into effect this summer. It is already illegal to carry a knife in public without reasonable excuse.

To tackle the root causes of violence, we have funded 20 violence reduction units which bring together law enforcement and local partners to tackle serious violence across England and Wales. These units have reached over 271,000 vulnerable young people in their fourth year of funding alone, through early intervention programmes to help protect them from serious violence.

Recent independent evaluation has shown that the government’s violence reduction units, in combination with hotspot policing patrols, have prevented an estimated 3,220 hospital admissions for violent injury since 2019 in areas where the programme operates.

This investment builds on significant work already delivered by the Home Office to develop innovative knife detection technologies, in collaboration with industry and partners such as the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, and the Defence and Security Accelerator.



Support for rough sleepers while tackling antisocial behaviour

May

From: Home Office, The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP and The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP

Through amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill, new measures will ensure rough sleepers are directed to the support available to help get them off the streets - for example to a place to sleep or addiction treatment.

New guidance will make clear that police and local authorities must prioritise directing people who are sleeping rough to support services before they consider using criminal sanctions. This will include directing people where to go to access health services or shelters.

If, despite being directed to support services and given a warning, people continue to cause antisocial behaviour, such as damage or harassment, they will be required to stop and asked to move on with a rough sleeping notice.

Home Secretary James Cleverly said:

“This government is committed to ending rough sleeping. To achieve this, we must take a multi-faceted approach that

supports vulnerable people off the streets and ensures everyone can feel safe in our neighbourhoods and communities.

We are scrapping the outdated



Vagrancy Act and replacing it with new measures that focus on supporting people, while ensuring the police and local authorities are able to address behaviour that makes the public feel unsafe.

This government listens, and we have worked hard to ensure these proposals prioritise helping vulnerable individuals, whilst ensuring communities are safer and better protected.”

Policing Minister Chris Philp said:

“Ending rough sleeping is a key priority for the government and is why we have a plan to tackle the root causes of why people end up on the streets, backed by an unprecedented £2.4 billion.

Nobody should be criminalised for having nowhere to live, but as we have always said, we will not accept behaviour that is antisocial or intimidating to the public, such as rough sleeping in a way that blocks a local business or fire escape.

I want to thank Bob Blackman MP and Nickie Aiken MP for their dedication and cooperation on this issue. We have listened carefully to the proposals and have worked constructively to ensure they are proportionate, properly targeted,

and ensure vulnerable people are directed towards support while protecting communities from antisocial behaviour.”

Alongside new measures in the Criminal Justice Bill, the Vagrancy Act will also be scrapped, which wrongly criminalises people for sleeping rough, while still criminalising behaviour that is antisocial or intimidating.

Through the new bill, if an individual is causing antisocial behaviour or intimidating others, they could be served with a notice that could require them to stop the behaviour or move on.

Ignoring such a notice, without a reasonable excuse, could be a criminal

offence and escalated to a court order containing further requirements, such as attending drug treatment.

The government will also remove references to odours in the bill. This will clarify that previous references to ‘smells’, which had been intended to tackle rubbish dumped or human waste, were never intended to wrongly criminalise anyone for not being able to wash.

This is part of the government’s wider work to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping for good backed by a £2.4 billion investment over three years which includes tailored support for vulnerable people. Since 2018, more than 740,000 households have been prevented from becoming homeless or supported into settled accommodation.

The rough sleeping and nuisance begging provisions, together with the repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824, will come into force 3 months after the Criminal Justice Bill receives royal assent, allowing for local authorities and police to have appropriate time to work with communities and charities to understand and implement the new laws.



New dentists required to deliver NHS care under government plans

May

From: Department of Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom and The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP

Consultation asks whether newly qualified dentists should commit to delivering a minimum amount of NHS work after graduating or repay some training fees.

- Proposals would require dental graduates to work in the NHS for several years after graduating or repay their training fees
- Part of government and NHS plan to recover dentistry and boost the dental workforce through 40% training expansion

Newly qualified dentists could be required to deliver NHS care for several years after they graduate under a government consultation being launched today (23 May 2024).

Training an individual dentist can cost up to around £300,000, of which costs in the

region of £200,000 are not repayable by the student.

However, a growing proportion of dentists are opting to go straight into private practice or are choosing to deliver little to no NHS work shortly after completing postgraduate dental foundation training.



Of more than 35,000 dentists registered with the General Dental Council in England, just over 24,000 delivered some NHS care in England in 2022 to 2023. This means nearly one-third of registered dentists are not contributing to NHS dentistry and may be working solely in private practice.

Under its consultation, which will run for 8 weeks, the government is asking whether newly qualified dentists should commit to delivering a minimum amount of NHS dental care for a minimum number of years after graduating, and whether they should repay some of the public funding invested in their training if they do not.

Health and Social Care Secretary Victoria Atkins said:

“I want to make access to dentistry faster, simpler and fairer for everyone - and part of this is ensuring that

dentists are supporting the NHS with their skills and expertise.

Taxpayers make a significant investment in training dentists, so it is only right to expect dental graduates to work in the NHS once they've completed their training.

This builds on our dental recovery plan, which set out how we will create up to 2.5 million extra appointments this year alone and is already showing results with an extra 500 practices providing appointments.”

Today's proposals form part of the government's overall plan to accelerate the recovery of NHS dentistry from the COVID-19 pandemic and reform how NHS dentistry operates.

They build on the aims of NHS Long Term Workforce Plan to expand the dental workforce and improve access to NHS dental care, especially in under-served parts of the country.

The government believes working in the NHS will give dental graduates the best start to their careers, by giving them the broadest range of experience, great support from strong teams of dental professionals and the most comprehensive training.

Experience in NHS dentistry helps to produce well-rounded clinicians who can work alongside different professions and deliver high quality and safe patient care, and can be supplemented by additional work in private dentistry. The government believes this balance is better for our skilled dental workforce and better for the patients they treat.

NHS dentists are currently delivering a greater volume of NHS treatment than the year before, with 'courses of treatments delivered' increasing by 23% in 2022 to 2023, compared to the previous year.

Primary Care Minister Andrea Leadsom said:

“I want to thank our hard-working dentists



for their efforts in treating more and more patients over recent years and helping us improve access to care.

Through our dental recovery plan, we're helping the sector recover from the pandemic and making NHS dentistry a more attractive career choice.

Today's proposals will ensure dental graduates benefit from the broad experience and comprehensive training of working in the NHS, while also delivering value for money for the taxpayer.”

There is currently no requirement for dentists to work in the NHS following the completion of their training. In contrast, a graduate medic in the UK must undertake a minimum of one year of foundation training to register as a doctor, followed by an additional year of foundation training and at least 3 years of general practice specialty training to become a GP.

Jason Wong, Chief Dental Officer for England, said:

“Dental services were severely impacted by the pandemic, and it is a priority for the NHS to improve access,

so it is easier for people to see a dentist.

We launched our dental recovery plan earlier this year to deliver millions more appointments across England - and boosting the workforce is one step we can take to achieve this.”

Neil Carmichael, Executive Chair of the Association of Dental Groups, said:

“We welcome the chance to engage with this consultation and ensure the NHS benefits from the skills of our graduate dentists.

We need to see more trained dentists entering the profession and we will work with the government to ensure these proposals reflect the sector’s mixed economy and considers the needs of both NHS and private dentistry.”

Louise Ansari, CEO at Healthwatch England, said:

“We welcome the opportunity for the public to have their say about these long-term proposals to address dental workforce issues, especially as access to NHS appointments continues to be one of the main issues we hear about from people across the country.

We also look forward to seeing separate government proposals on reforming the NHS dental contract in the coming months, as set out in the dental recovery plan. In the meantime, NHS bodies that plan and fund dentistry across England should take concerted and imaginative action to ensure people in greatest need can get dental care quickly.”

The launch of the consultation is the latest milestone in the delivery of the government’s dental recovery plan. Since the plan was published in February, the government and NHS have worked to:

- introduce a new patient premium, supporting dentists to take on new patients - with more than 500 more practices saying they are now open to new patients compared to January
- launch the ‘golden hello’ recruitment scheme to incentivise dentists to work in under-served areas
- raise the minimum units of dental activity (UDA) rate to £28 this year, making NHS work more attractive and sustainable
- open a consultation on proposals to make it easier for overseas dentists to work in the UK

Nature and Technology

welters® environmental orbs in this image have, over time, become one with nature. The moss and ferns have grown over the top of the orbs, almost camouflaging them at the base of a tree where mushrooms already grow in abundance.



Post Office (Horizon) convictions quashed

May

From: Department for Business and Trade

Convictions of hundreds of postmasters have been quashed today (24 May) following Royal Assent of the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024.

Many postmasters endured financial ruin, the loss of homes, livelihoods, reputation and some even lost their lives as a result of the Horizon IT Scandal which is one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in our history.

Following Royal Assent today, all convictions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will now be quashed providing they meet the following criteria:

- Prosecutions were brought about by the Post Office or CPS (or in Northern Ireland, the state prosecutor or the police).
- Offences were carried out in connection

with Post Office business between 1996 and 2018.

- Were for relevant offences such as theft, fraud and false accounting.
- Were against sub-postmasters, their employees, officers, family members or direct employees of the Post Office working in a Post Office that used the Horizon system software.
- The conviction has not been considered by the Court of Appeal

This clears their names, delivers justice, and ensures swifter access to the financial redress they deserve.

Postmasters will be written to in the coming weeks as the process for notifying them of their overturned convictions commences. An open letter to postmasters to set out next steps has also been published today.

The Department for Business and Trade continue to work on the new Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme for those who have had their convictions quashed by today's legislation. This will be fully operational by the summer.



UK and Latvia launch industry competition to provide thousands of drones for Ukraine

June

From: Ministry of Defence

In February, the UK and Latvia announced that they would lead the new Drone Capability Coalition, designed to rapidly supply Ukraine with tens of thousands of first person view drones.

Today, the UK and Latvia have opened the bidding for companies to supply FPV drones to Ukraine, on behalf of the Drone Capability Coalition. This competition aims to produce these drones at scale and at an affordable price point, leveraging the strength of Western industry.

Industry can find the details of how to apply via the Defence Sourcing Portal. This competition is open to industry from any nation in the Ukraine Defence Contact Group.

Companies have until 28 June 2024 to submit their proposals, which will then be considered by the Drone Capability Coalition members and evaluated. Successful companies will receive orders to supply drones to Ukraine and, upon receipt of positive operational feedback, the intent is to place larger, follow up orders for FPV drones. Additional FPV competitions are expected to take place through 2024, building on the lessons

learned from this first competition.

First person view drones have proven highly effective on the battlefield since Russia's full-scale invasion, providing Ukrainian operators with situational awareness to target enemy positions, armoured vehicles, and ships with explosive ordnance.

Members of the coalition include: UK, Latvia, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Ukraine. Further countries are considering joining the coalition.



New action to protect against impacts of bark beetle tree pest

June

From: Forestry Commission

Forestry Commission to introduce new plant health requirements following confirmation of eight-toothed spruce bark beetle findings in Suffolk and Norfolk.

Woodland managers, landowners and the forestry industry are encouraged to remain vigilant as the Forestry Commission today (Wednesday 5 June) announces an expansion of the current *Ips typographus* demarcated area following findings of the tree pest, also known as the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle, on Norway spruce in East Anglia.

The eight-toothed spruce bark beetle is a serious pest of spruce trees in Europe and was first identified in the UK in Kent in 2018. It prefers stressed or dying trees but under the right conditions it can attack healthy trees and has the potential to cause significant damage to Great Britain's forestry and timber industries.

From Wednesday 12 June 2024 requirements will come into force across an extended, larger demarcated area (DMA) in the South East of England and East Anglia to prevent potential spread of the pest, in line with the eradication action taken by the Forestry Commission



to manage outbreaks.

The existing Demarcated area, last extended in 2022, covers parts of Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, City of London, Greater London, West Sussex, East Sussex, Kent, Essex and Hampshire. After findings of *Ips typographus* were reported to Forestry Commission, the extended zone will now cover parts of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

Within these areas, the felling and movement of all spruce material, including trees and wood with bark, isolated bark, and wood chip with bark, is prohibited within the demarcated area unless authorised by the Forestry Commission. Woodland managers must provide written notification to the Forestry Commission if they intend to fell or kill

any trees of the genus *Picea* A. Dietr over three metres in height. Click here for full guidance of the requirements.

Additionally, processing of spruce material which has originated in the demarcated area may only be undertaken at premises authorised by the Forestry Commission to receive this material and there is also a prohibition of susceptible material being left in situ, unless authorised in writing by a plant health inspector.

The Forestry Commission continues to robustly manage this pest and prevent its establishment within Great Britain. Landowners, managers and timber processors should remain vigilant for *Ips typographus* and are encouraged to continue to check the health of spruce trees on their land especially as temperatures rise and we enter the flight season. Any suspected findings of the beetle can be reported using the online portal TreeAlert.

Forestry Commission spokesperson Andrea Deol said:

“Following a report of *Ips typographus* to the Forestry Commission in East Anglia, we conducted a swift investigation including rapid eradication measures,

alongside wider environment surveillance to determine the scale of the issue and identify additional suitable management actions.

All landowners, managers and timber processors should remain vigilant for *Ips typographus*. It is important for landowners to continue to check the health of spruce trees on their land, this is particularly important now we are entering the next flight season.”

For authorisation to commence felling, move or process spruce material that has originated in the demarcated area

please contact ipstypographus.authorisation@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

Landowners and managers served with a Statutory Plant Health Notice due to an outbreak on their site may be eligible for grants to support felling and restocking activity through the Tree Health Pilot. The Forestry Commission is encouraging landowners to proactively remove spruce from the South East of England and replant with other non-susceptible species



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Cat microchipping now mandatory

June

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

All cat owners should now have their pets microchipped as new legislation comes into force 10th June.

Owners must ensure their cat is microchipped before they reach the age of 20 weeks with their contact details stored and kept up to date in an approved pet microchipping database.

With more than 9 million pet cats in England, the introduction of mandatory microchipping will make it easier for lost or stray pet cats to be reunited with their owners and returned home safely. Microchipping is already compulsory for dogs and is proven to be the most effective method for identifying lost pets, with microchipped dogs more than twice as likely to be reunited with their owner.

Microchips are safe and easy to implant

with an average cost of around £25 for microchipping and registration. Charities and reputable cat rescue organisations may be able to microchip your cat for a reduced rate.

The process of microchipping involves the insertion of a chip, generally around the size of a grain of rice, under the skin of a pet. The microchip has a unique serial number that the keeper needs



to register on a database. When an animal is found, the microchip can be read with a scanner and the registered keeper identified on a database so the pet can quickly be reunited with them.

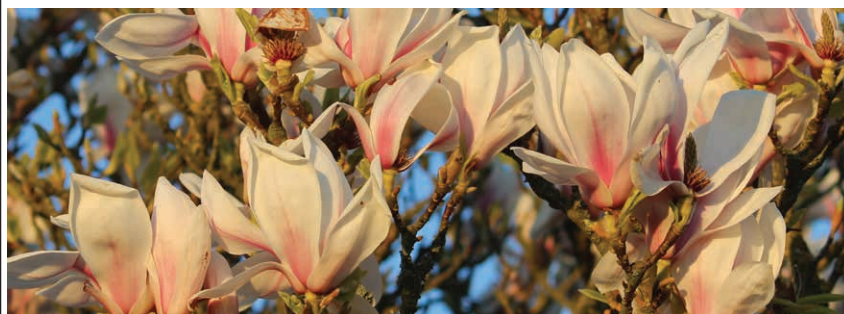
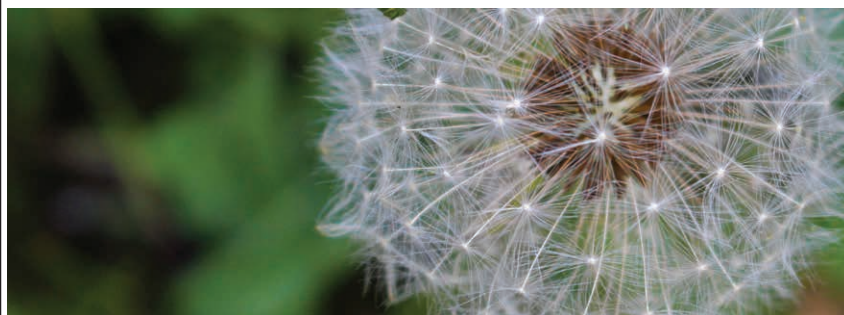
Owned cats must be microchipped before reaching 20 weeks of age, with their contact details stored and kept up to date on a pet microchipping database. This includes cats that usually only stay indoors.

Microchipping is not compulsory for free living cats that live with little or no human interaction or dependency, such as farm, feral or community cats.

The legal deadline was confirmed in legislation laid in March 2023 giving owners over a year to comply with the new requirements. Failing to comply with the law could see owners receive a fine of up to £500.

Forthcoming articles under consideration

- Is the UK getting wetter?
- What can we do to stop teachers being overlooked and undervalued?
- How can the increasing availability of artificial intelligence be used to improve lives?
- What are we, as a country, doing to move towards clean power?
- Are we doing enough to prevent future cyber attacks?



considered by our Editorial Department for the Spring edition as alternatives to the final chosen cover

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