

Call for Ghostbusters-style home testing for Covid-19



25 March 2020

- Doctors call for Ghostbusters-style mobile teams of health workers in full personal protective equipment to administer home tests
- Call for Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to medics working on the frontline as well as backroom advisers
- Testing availability is ramping up, potentially enabling a pilot followed by rapid rollout, in line with WHO advice to “test, test, test”.

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry has joined with children’s doctor Alex Armitage to call for mobile teams to deliver home tests for Covid19.

The virus is set to “overwhelm” the NHS, Dr Armitage warned this week in a video for the BBC’s Panorama, with cases rising at an alarming rate and each day’s number of deaths higher than the last.

With growing levels of NHS staff absence, Dr Armitage has already made an urgent call for tests for healthcare workers, to show clearly whether they have the virus and need to self-isolate or if they can get back to work.

Huge numbers of new tests are starting to become available, so Dr Armitage said the UK could finally start to follow World Health Organisation advice to ‘test, test, test’ in the wider population.

He and Ms Berry hope to see community health workers testing people for the virus at home in Ghostbusters-style teams wearing full personal protective equipment.

The scheme was developed by Edinburgh GP Dr Sam Watt, who had the idea while watching Ghostbusters with his son after a shift at work.

Dr Armitage said: “The first priority must be to protect our doctors, nurses and health staff from this highly infectious disease and we can’t do that if infectious people are coming into hospitals and GP surgeries for a test.

“If we’re to save as many lives as possible, we need our heroic health workers to get out there in full protective gear and start collecting samples from people in their own home, so we have a true picture of the problem.

“We want people to know who they’re gonna call – an NHS home testing hotline – to get help from our Ghostbusters-testing team.

“They will then visit you at home, perform a test, and set up remote monitoring so health workers can review your progress – and they will get you to hospital if needed.”

Dr Watt's "Edinburgh Method" could be trialled as a pilot scheme before an accelerated roll-out across the country.

The Edinburgh Method is aimed at catching the virus in the very early stages, when evidence shows isolation can be most effective. It also has the potential to significantly ease pressure on NHS inpatient beds, a vital commodity in the struggle against the virus.

Once people have tested positive, they can stay at home and be remotely monitored by health workers in a "virtual hospital ward" using existing telemedicine technology. If patients deteriorate, they can be brought to hospital for intensive care.

Dr Armitage urged Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to frontline NHS doctors, working in a rapidly developing situation.

He said: "Coronavirus has created a situation that no one in Britain has had to deal with in living memory.

"We need new ideas in order to get through this.

"Innovation shouldn't just happen in the government's back offices, it needs to come from medics like Dr Watt, who are on the front line of the pandemic."

Sian Berry said she is looking for solutions to lead Britain out of the pandemic, minimising the deaths and lasting lung damage caused by the disease, and thinks mobile testing units are a "necessary and vital" idea.

She said: "Knowing who does and does not have the virus is essential for stopping the spread, which is currently happening so fast our NHS will not be able to hold back the tide at current rates.

"The belated decision to lock down Britain is welcome but we can still do more to protect our key workers from infection.

"We need people to stay at home and follow NHS advice – and developing a plan now for how mobile testing units will work in the community could be one more way of holding back the spread."

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New nurses on frontline of coronavirus battle face up to £62,000 of debt



24 March 2020

New nurses and midwives will be stepping on to the frontline of the coronavirus crisis with up to £62,000 of debt following the scrapping of the NHS bursary, Green Party peer Natalie Bennett has highlighted in a speech in the House of Lords today.

Bennett, a former leader of the Green Party and peer since October 2019, has now urged the government to provide exceptional grants of £15,000 to the nurses and midwives who are finishing their course this year after missing out on the bursary which was scrapped in 2017.

According to government figures, the change will have seen a student nurse or midwife take on debts worth up to £61,812 in tuition fee loans and maintenance loans for living costs.[1]

Bennett said:

“Most of the nurses and midwives who are finishing their courses early and stepping in now to provide crucial services in this crisis belong to the cohort exceptionally hit by debt.

“They carry tuition debts of nearly £28,000 and many will have had to take out loans for living costs, up to £34,000 for those living in London.

“I ask, no I beg the government to recognise these women and men who will be risking their lives for us in the weeks and months ahead and at a minimum to make an exceptional grant of £15,000 each to bring them into the same position as new students getting grants of £5,000 a year.”

In December, the government announced a new grant of £5,000 a year for new nursing and midwifery students from September 2020. [2]

Bennett asked the government in a written question before the Coronavirus epidemic whether it would be compensating this cohort. It said no.

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Notes

1

Figures provided by the House of Lords Library in response to a question by Natalie Bennett.

Tuition Fees Loans

A student starting a course in the 2017/18 academic year would have been able to take out a tuition fees loan of up to £9,250 per year. At the end of a 3-year course beginning in 2017, these students may have taken on a maximum of £27,750 of student loan debt in order to pay tuition fees.

Maintenance Loans for Living Costs

Following the end of the NHS bursary, student nurses and midwives were able to apply for maintenance loans for living costs. While the amount borrowed varies depending on a student's circumstances, in the 2018/19 academic year, the maximum amounts of maintenance loans available per year were:

- £11,354 for people studying in London
- £8,700 for people studying elsewhere
- £7,324 for people living at home while studying

On average, in 2017/18, students took out an income contingent maintenance loan worth £5,590. In 2018/19, this increased to £6,150 (Department for Education, [Student Support for Higher Education in England 2019](#), 21 November 2019, p 1).

2

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nursing-students-to-receive-5-000-payment-a-year>

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[Dangerous rush hour crowding putting key workers at risk](#)



24 March 2020

- Dangerous overcrowding on the Tube at rush hour is increasing risk
- Already limited services are being squeezed as TfL workers are getting sick
- Employers and the Government must act to stop non-essential travel

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry has called for action to tackle dangerous overcrowding during rush hour, which is putting key workers at risk.

Overcrowding on Transport for London services is rising as already-limited services are squeezed by growing numbers of transport workers off sick or in self-isolation.

Ms Berry called on employers to immediately close their businesses if they were not essential.

Employers providing essential services must look at staggering office hours, she added, to minimise rush hour overcrowding.

She said: "Most Londoners cannot afford to live near their jobs, and I don't think anyone is lightly getting on the tube at peak times who doesn't think they need to be at work.

"So non-key employers must close and minimise staff. Remaining key employers need to work immediately, starting today with the ends of shifts, on plans to stagger start times and end times so we can stop this dangerous crowding."

Ms Berry said it was clear some non-essential employers were failing to close, so further measures may be necessary to keep public transport free for key workers.

"We must be considering next steps like controlled entry to the tube, restricting it just to key workers," she said. "Work IDs for vital staff such as cleaners and shop workers should be issued today in preparation for this possibility.

"There are resource and practical questions with any further measures. Even more TfL staff, and police, would be needed for controlled entry to the tube – and queues and disorder at stations would also be a risk to be considered. This is not easy."

Ms Berry also reiterated the need for more support for workers who are not directly employed who may be going to work for fear of losing their incomes, and called again for a universal basic income:

"Once again we need full support, and conversion of benefits into a universal basic income, for all employees, contractors and the self employed now.

"Even if only a fraction stay working because they can't risk lost incomes, every person adds to the overcrowding risk. Partial schemes mean partial compliance."

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[Sian Berry responds to the Chancellor's job retention scheme announcement](#)



20 March 2020

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry said:

"This is certainly a step in the right direction and will provide relief for many workers across the country, but it does not go far enough for the self-employed and those in the gig economy.

"For real security now and in the future, this scheme needs to include a Universal Basic Income which will provide financial security for everybody and allow people to follow public health advice free from the fear of losing their livelihoods.

"It is also vital that the government does not delay in extending the worker retention scheme at the end of the three months if necessary. The government's delay in responding to the crisis so far has caused so much worry which has to be avoided in future."

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[Jonathan Bartley calls for Universal Basic Income to provide financial protection](#)



20 March 2020

Chancellor Rishi Sunak is set to announce a new package for workers today amid the coronavirus crisis.

Ahead of the announcement, Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley has urged the government to adopt a Universal Basic Income in order to ensure financial protection for all.

Bartley said:

“Right now, people are having to choose between not paying rent, or risking the spread of infection by going out to work. Nobody should have to face this decision. People need and deserve protection.

“Half measures like freezing Income Tax and National Insurance won’t do. This just kicks the can down the road, and is of no help to people who have lost their jobs or don’t have enough work hours to make ends meet. All of us still have bills to pay and mouths to feed.

“We must have a Universal Basic Income. This would give people real financial protection and the freedom to follow the public health advice in the knowledge that we are protected from poverty.”

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