

Conor Burns MP resignation letter and the Prime Minister's response

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

GAD project helps 1,000+ pension scheme members

Pensions specialists at the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) have completed a project which involved compulsorily transferring the pension benefits of more than a thousand ex-civil servants back into the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

We provided actuarial advice to the different stakeholders involved in this project. These included the trustees of the Babcock Naval Services Pension Scheme (BNSPS), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Cabinet Office as scheme manager to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

GAD put 3 separate teams in place to avoid any conflicts of interest with 'ethical walls' maintained between the teams to ensure client confidentiality.

Transferring benefits

BNSPS was created in 2002 when 1,500 ex-civil servants transferred employment to Babcock and a pension scheme was required that was 'broadly comparable' to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

The security of members' benefits within the scheme was backed by MOD. The introduction of the government's Fair Deal (2013) policy of keeping staff like these in public service pension schemes, rather than in private sector 'broadly comparable' schemes, led to changes.

It was agreed that the ex-civil servants in the scheme would re-join the Civil Service Pension Scheme and their pension benefits in the Babcock scheme would compulsorily transfer back.

Pensions teams across GAD provided actuarial advice around the transfer back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme. The terms of the transfer were agreed in early 2018 after extensive discussions. Implementation began shortly after, and the project was completed in September 2019, having successfully transferred the members back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

Partnership working

Commenting on the extensive project, GAD actuary, Natacha Lamaletie said: “This transfer was one of a kind because all the former civil servants, not just ‘active members’ in the scheme, were compulsorily transferred back to the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

“We ensured the project went smoothly and was completed on time. It was a joint effort between a number of GAD teams.”

As part of the project, GAD also worked with the receiving pension administrators to make sure their systems were set up to deal with taking on the members’ benefits, ensuring seamless transition and payment of benefits.

[Ofqual publishes initial decisions on GCSE and A level grading proposals for 2020](#)

Our [consultation on the exceptional arrangements we have put in place for awarding GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer](#) closed on 29 April. We are grateful for the 12,500 plus responses we have received from teachers, teacher representative groups and unions, university or higher education institutions, parents, carers and students; we are taking these into account when finalising our plans.

To give students, schools and colleges certainty at the earliest opportunity, we have prioritised our [analysis and decisions on 2 proposals about who should receive a calculated grade](#).

Calculated grades for students in year 10 and below

In line with our consultation proposal, we have decided that students entered for exams in year 10 and below will be eligible to receive calculated grades this summer. This follows the majority of responses received, which indicate that the progression of some students would be disrupted if they were not awarded a grade this summer, and to exclude them would have an unfair impact. Amongst the responses we received were concerns about the potential impact of excluding early entrants on disabled students or those with special

educational needs, who might wish to spread their GCSE exams over different years.

Private candidates

There was broad support for our proposal to only allow exam boards to issue results for private candidates for whom the Head of Centre is confident they can submit a centre assessment grade and include them in the centre's rank order. The majority of respondents considered this necessary for the fairness and integrity of the approach. Most of those who disagreed were students who are private candidates themselves and their parents or carers.

We have worked with exam boards to explore options for private candidates to receive grades this summer. Last week, the boards set out new guidance, and we [published an update to our Information document](#), about the alternative sources of evidence a school or college might consider where it does not have sufficient evidence about a student's attainment to submit a centre assessment grade and rank order information. It also confirms that some students may transfer to another centre ahead of the grading process if the centre where they had registered decides it cannot submit a centre assessment grade. In this case, some other centres may be able to work with private candidates who need a grade this summer in order to progress. So that the grading process is fair, the Head of Centre must have the same level of confidence in the grade and rank order position as for all other students when providing information to the exam board.

We said in our consultation decision document that we could not identify any reliable way to calculate grades for private candidates who could not be included within a centre's cohort of students. No workable possibilities were advanced by respondents to the consultation and we have decided that private candidates can be included only through centres.

We are continuing to analyse consultation responses on our other proposals for awarding GCSEs, AS/A levels, Extended Project Qualification and Advanced Extension Award in maths this summer; we will publish final decisions later in May.

Separately, our [consultation on arrangements for awarding vocational, technical and other general qualifications](#), including proposals for early entrants and private candidates in these qualifications, remains open until Friday 8 May.

[DASA awards £2.3m to develop novel sensor technology](#)

The [Defence and Security Accelerator \(DASA\)](#) has awarded 13 contracts worth a

total of £2.3 million to develop improved Electro-Optics and Infrared (EOIR) sensor capability, it was announced today .

[The Advanced Vision 2020 and Beyond competition](#), run on behalf of the [Defence Science and Technology Laboratory \(Dstl\)](#), sought innovation and novel approaches from industry, including small and medium-sized enterprises and academia.

Electro-Optic and Infrared (EOIR) sensors are a key military capability used for surveillance, reconnaissance, target acquisition, threat warning, target detection and more.

Potential use cases of the innovative approaches being developed include:

- Imaging in difficult environments such as through clouds or smoke, low or no light, and through foliage or camouflage
- Detecting and identifying small targets such as drones, snipers, people, weapons, and vehicles
- Identifying objects more than 20km away and classify friendly or adversary vehicles

Additionally, EOIR sensors offer a complementary approach to radio frequency sensors, being able to detect objects in environments where radar is challenged or to operate against objects that have a naturally lower radar signature so are harder to identify.

Andy Cole, Dstl project manager, said:

The ever evolving nature of military operations means that we wish to invest in novel and resilient technologies that can function in contested and congested environments, that will extend the range, lower the cost and size, and expand the range of targets that can be addressed by EOIR sensors.

DASA associate delivery manager Katy Violet said:

DASA finds and funds the best innovative ideas and solutions from the brightest minds in science, technology, academia, and research to give our Armed Forces and security services advantage over our adversaries, while supporting brilliant UK companies from start-ups, small and medium-sized businesses, academia right through to major employers.

Those awarded contracts are:

- Thales
- Teledyne e2v
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Exeter

- QinetiQ (2 funded proposals)
 - University of Stirling
 - Heriot-Watt University
 - University of Bristol
 - Iceni Labs
 - Frazer-Nash Consultancy
 - Living Optics
 - Spectra Medical
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Leave lockdown in lockstep

I believe that when Scotland is ready to emerge from lockdown we should do so in lockstep with the UK as a whole.

There are strong, practical reasons why this should happen.

It's important, as Scotland's two governments make such onerous, difficult demands on people to stay at home and to stay away from family and friends, that we speak with the same voice.

If we can present a simple, clear, united message, it will be much more effective.

The more we feel we are in this together, the more we will pull together – to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

A UK-wide approach will also be best for Scottish businesses.

It will help our economy recover as strongly as possible. It will help save as many jobs as possible.

We are, after all, part of the UK economy.

Sixty per cent of Scotland's trade is with the rest of the UK and as we begin to ease restrictions our businesses will need a level playing field to compete.

So I'm in no doubt that moving forward as one United Kingdom will save lives and save livelihoods.

I'm glad to say that the UK Government and the Scottish Government are in agreement on that broad principle.

Nicola Sturgeon has acknowledged the advantages of taking a UK-wide approach to tackling coronavirus.

She has spoken consistently of the benefits of working together, of the UK remaining in alignment.

We've both made the point that coronavirus does not respect borders and the First Minister has been clear it would be wrong for the Scottish Government to issue different guidance 'just for the sake of it'.

That's a sentiment I welcome.

Devolution, rightly, gives the Scottish Government a key role in responding to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the ability to do things differently, which is central to devolution, does not, and never has, meant that things must be done differently or are best done differently.

The coronavirus pandemic is a national emergency and has created an unprecedented challenge for the whole of the UK. We should meet the challenge together.

Up to now there have been some differences in approach, though most have been minor.

But where differences have been more substantial, the Scottish Government have not made good decisions.

Using Scotland's share of extra UK Government funding for business support, they created a system that put many firms at a huge disadvantage compared with south of the border.

Even now – after a U-turn forced by an outcry among businesspeople and pressure led by Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw – levels of support for the hard-hit retail, hospitality and leisure sector falls well short of what's on offer in England.

The Scottish Government has also failed to justify their decision to shut down all building sites apart from hospitals.

South of the border the advice is to continue to go to work, but only where it can be done safely and where you are unable to work from home.

Here, the Scottish Government have decreed no building site can be operated safely. They have not explained why – but we do know the decision is having a disastrous impact on the Scottish building industry.

I applaud businesses, such as the famous shortbread baker Walkers, on Speyside, who used a brief shut down to figure out safe working practices and who are now back up and running as best they can.

They know they must do everything they can to keep their businesses going and so protect the jobs and livelihoods of their workforces. This can only be done if they maintain their share of the market in the UK and further afield.

Our vitally important Scotch Whisky industry has also been at its innovative best to design safe ways of working.

They've not only continued to produce and bottle our national drink, they have provided huge quantities of badly-needed hand sanitiser to keep frontline health and care workers safe.

Their effort is a very neat example of protecting people and protecting the economy at the same time.

Let me be clear, we are not yet at the point where we are able to start 'unlocking' our society, because we have not yet met our five tests. For now, everyone needs to continue to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. But I am equally clear, when the data shows we can start easing the restrictions we are all currently living with, it will be important to do so as one United Kingdom.