

Secretary of State Co-Chairs Third Covid-19 Joint Ministerial Conference Call

News story

A joint statement following a COVID-19 call chaired by Secretary of State Brandon Lewis and Tanaiste Simon Coveney



Today the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, and the Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, jointly chaired a third conference call with the First Minister Arlene Foster, deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, Health Minister Robin Swann and Minister for Health Simon Harris to discuss the ongoing response to COVID-19.

They discussed the latest developments on a North/South and East-West basis on the efforts to combat Covid-19.

They emphasised the importance of continuing the good engagement that has taken place between Health Ministers. They reaffirmed their commitment to continued close contact and work, through the process set out in the memorandum of understanding, for the benefit of all people across the island of Ireland.

They agreed that all our health and social care workers continue to show extraordinary courage, and dedication, in their efforts on the frontline to tackle this virus.

There is also no doubt that the responsibility shown by the public in adhering to social distancing has made a huge difference in controlling the spread of the virus and saving lives. With public health measures under ongoing review in both jurisdictions, it was agreed that it will be essential to maintain strong North/South collaborative arrangements and, wherever possible, consistency of approach.

Health Ministers and Chief Medical Officers will continue to work in support

of these objectives through the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding and further developments in this regard will be reviewed at the next meeting in this format.

Published 30 April 2020

[NHS-funded nursing care rate announced for 2020 to 2021](#)

News story

The NHS-funded nursing care rate is being increased to £183.92 from 1 April 2020.



The NHS-funded nursing care standard weekly rate per person for 2019 to 2020 will increase and be backdated to 1 April 2019.

The current rate of £165.56 will increase by 9% to £180.31 for the 2019 to 2020 financial year.

The higher rate of NHS-funded nursing care will also increase by 9% from the current rate of £227.77 to £248.06 per week for 2019 to 2020. This is only relevant for people who were already on the higher rate in 2007 when the single band was introduced. This will also be backdated.

For the 2020 to 2021 financial year, the NHS-funded nursing care standard weekly rate per person will increase by 2% from £180.31 to £183.92. This will be backdated to 1 April 2020.

The higher rate of NHS-funded nursing care will also increase by 2% from £248.06 to £253.02 per week for 2020 to 2021. This is only relevant for people who were already on the higher rate in 2007 when the single band was introduced and will also be backdated to 1 April 2020.

VAT scrapped on E-publications

- move will potentially slash the cost of e-books and newspapers making reading more accessible as people stay at home
- newspapers to receive up to £35 million additional government advertising revenue as part of coronavirus communications campaign

Plans to scrap VAT on e-books and e-newspapers have been significantly fast-tracked in a boost to readers and publishers during the coronavirus outbreak, the Chancellor announced today.

Rishi Sunak said the zero rate of VAT will now apply to all e-publications from tomorrow (1 May 2020) – seven months ahead of schedule – potentially slashing the cost of a £12 e-book by £2 and e-newspapers subscriptions by up to £25 a year.

In support of the print newspaper industry, the government has also announced it will be spending up to £35 million on newspaper advertising over the next 3 months as part of its Covid-19 communications campaign to ensure the whole UK is aware of the latest government guidance and advice.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

We want to make it as easy as possible for people across the UK to get hold of the books they want whilst they are staying at home and saving lives.

That is why we have fast tracked plans to scrap VAT on all e-publications, which will make it cheaper for publishers to sell their books, magazines and newspapers.

With the nation staying in their homes during lockdown and schools closed, millions have been relying more on e-publications to pass time, home school and read the news. The Chancellor has opted to bring the zero rating forward to make entertainment more affordable for readers who are rightly staying at home during the coronavirus crisis – and are more reliant on e-publications as a result.

The price of an e-book will now be VAT-free. The e-book of Hilary Mantel's *The Mirror and The Light* could be over £2 cheaper while the average tax annual saving on a typical e-newspaper or e-magazine subscription could be £25 or £20 respectively.

The move will be a boost both to readers in the form of cheaper e-books and

e-newspapers, and the publishing industry who should benefit from a boost in sales.

On average publishers are reporting an increase of about a third in e-book consumption during the crisis, with some publishers reporting as much as a 50% increase. In the last seven days alone, subscriptions to TI media are up 200%, whilst Hearst's new subscribers were up more than 100% year-on-year across the second half of March.

The £35 million extra advertising revenue will be split between local, regional and national print media, and will be a vital boost to the media industry. These plans will be constantly reviewed over the next three months to ensure the campaign is as effective as possible.

Both the e-publications measure and the increased advertising spending are UK-wide.

Notes

Readers, who rely on large print sizes or find physical books difficult to hold, are expected to particularly benefit from digital reading being more financially accessible.

At the Budget in March, the Chancellor originally announced he would be applying a zero rate of VAT to supplies of e-publications (e-books, e-newspapers, e-magazines and academic e-journals) to support reading and literacy from 1 December 2020.

Research by the National Literacy Trust indicates that 1 in 4 pupils on free school meals say they read fiction digitally compared to 1 in 6 of their peers not eligible for free school meals and that over 45% of children prefer to read on an electronic device.

Statistics on e-book consumption provided by Publishers Association.

Statistics on TI Media and Hearst subscriptions provided by Professional Publishers Association

The government recognises the vital role that media organisations, including newspapers, play in ensuring the provision of trusted, high quality information and their ability to reach isolated and harder to reach communities, such as BAME and older communities.

In light of this, the government has established advertising partnerships with the nation's favourite and most-trusted media titles, as a way of delivering important government communications on coronavirus. This has allowed the government to leverage the powerful and familiar voices of over 600 national, regional and local titles across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is estimated these partnerships will reach 34 million people every day and 92% of adults in the UK each month.

Privacy Notice

Data Controller Name: The Northern Ireland Office

Address: Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SH

Data Protection Officer Name: Lloyd Ryan

Telephone: 028 90765431

Email: foi@nio.gov.uk

The NIO is committed to protecting your privacy. This privacy notice explains how the NIO uses information about you and the ways in which we will protect your privacy.

What information we process

The information we process includes:

- personal details
- family and social circumstances
- financial details
- education and training details
- employment, absence and leave details

We also process sensitive classes of information that include:

- physical and/or mental health
- racial or ethnic origin
- religious, or other beliefs of a similar nature
- community background
- sexual orientation
- trade union membership
- criminal offences or convictions

Why are you processing my personal information?

We handle personal information in order to comply with our legal obligations and other pension, employment and statutory equality legislation. The processing of personal information is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority.

Where do you get my personal information from?

We obtain personal information directly from you when you contact us about our services. We will provide reasons for collecting personal data and advise when your consent is required for a specific purpose. Your consent must be given freely and can be withdrawn at any time by contacting the department.

Do you share my personal information with anyone else?

It may on occasions be necessary to share your personal data with other government departments and agencies to meet our legal or public function requirements, or in your vital interest.

Do you transfer my personal outside the European Union?

- Your personal information will not be transferred outside the European Union.
- Your personal data will not be used for any automated decision making.
- Your personal data will be stored in a secure government IT system.

How long do you keep my personal information?

We will keep your personal information only for as long as it is required for the lawful purpose(s) for which it was obtained and in line with our Retention and Disposal Schedules.

How we keep your personal data secure

Clerical and electronic records that contain any personal information will be held in a secure way, and will only be made available to those who have a right to see them.

We use technical and organisational measures such as:

- Encryption of our data and IT equipment
- Regular data protection training for our staff
- Regular testing of our technology
- Restricted access controls
- Physical security measures

What rights do I have?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being processed, and access to your personal information;
- You are entitled to have personal information rectified if it is

inaccurate or incomplete;

- You have the right to have personal information erased and to prevent processing, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to 'block' or suppress processing of personal information, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to data portability, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to object to the processing, in specific circumstances;
- You have rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling;
- You have the right to withdraw any consent that you have given.

You can find out if we hold any information by making a 'subject access request'. If we do hold information about you, we will:

- Give you a description of it;
- Tell you why we are holding it;
- Tell you who it could be disclosed to; and
- Let you have a copy of the information in an intelligible form.

To make a request to access any personal information we may hold about you, you should put the request in writing and email it to: foi@nio.gov.uk

More information can be found on the [Information Commissioner's website](#)

How do I complain if I am not happy?

If you are unhappy with how any aspect of this privacy notice, or how personal information is being processed, please contact the NIO Data Protection Officer.

If you are still not happy, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):

Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

Changes to this Privacy Notice

We keep our privacy notice under regular review. This privacy notice was last updated in May 2018.

[Defence scientists trial innovation to slash ambulance cleaning time](#)

Trials of novel technology that could dramatically cut the time it takes to decontaminate ambulances have taken place following a rapid appeal by the [Defence and Security Accelerator \(DASA\)](#) in response to Coronavirus.

Scientists at the [Defence Science and Technology Laboratory \(Dstl\)](#) have tested 12 methods to speed-up the sanitising of ambulances – in some cases reducing cleaning time from an hour to around 10 minutes so more lives can be saved.

[DASA coronavirus response](#)

More than 200 ideas were submitted to DASA by industry in just seven days following the appeal, which was launched on behalf of the Welsh Ambulance Service, Welsh Government, The Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) Centre of Excellence, and Innovate UK.

Gabriella Cox, DASA security competition lead, said:

This has been a huge effort from everyone involved. The response by industry was remarkable and there has been a monumental effort by staff from DASA, Dstl and our partners to be able to complete this project in just 33 days.

Innovation has never been more important as we play our part in the national effort against Coronavirus.

Dstl scientist Steve Mitchell, who led the trials, said:

The trials have shown some really promising ideas ranging from fogging techniques, sprays, and using a decontaminant vapour to give a thorough and deep clean in the quickest time possible.

This has been a big challenge for everyone involved to turn this work around in such rapid time with the possibility of one of the solutions being taken forward by the Welsh Ambulance Service in the next week or so.

[Steve Mitchell interview](#)

[DASA asked businesses to come up with innovative solutions to accelerate the cleaning of ambulances so that crews can get back on the road and respond to](#)

[other emergency calls.](#)

It is hoped the solutions may also be used by other emergency services and possibly public transport.

The Welsh Ambulance Trust will consider results from the trials and successful solutions may be implemented across the organisation.

DASA finds and funds innovation for the UK's defence and national security.