

Border Force prioritising checks on medical equipment

This month, Border Force has introduced a new process for prioritising checks on medical equipment to ensure it reaches the NHS more quickly.

The new process ensures critical shipments are flagged to Border Force in advance by the NHS so that officers can stand ready to process them as soon as possible.

Border Force officers then process the shipments quickly, whilst continuing to conduct thorough security checks.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

I will do whatever necessary to help the national effort to tackle this virus, that is why Border Force are prioritising medical equipment so that it can enter the UK as soon as possible.

This will ensure that the NHS and frontline workers can get the equipment they need as quickly as possible so they can continue saving lives and fighting the virus.

The process has been in place since the beginning of April, with Border Force working closely with suppliers, the NHS and HMRC to ensure all relevant shipments are flagged.

In addition, last week, the Treasury announced that it was waiving import taxes on medical equipment crucial to the fight against coronavirus – reducing red tape to ensure equipment gets to frontline health workers faster.

Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Jesse Norman, said:

We have already waived import taxes on crucial medical equipment coming to the UK, such as protective gear, tests and ventilators. Today's announcement will further support the NHS, so that frontline workers get the supplies they need to save lives.

All shipments remain subject to the same controls including checks against illegal immigration, prohibited and restricted items and revenue fraud.

Border Force will continue to support the essential services provided by the NHS during this period for as long as is required.

This is one measure being brought in by Border Force in response to coronavirus and is part of wider robust contingency plans in place to ensure there is no disruption to their efforts to maintain security.

Letter to the Loan Charge All-Party Parliamentary Group about communications with HMRC customers

- 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.

A listening ear

Sellafield's new chaplain, David Flitcroft is one person who's ready to offer just that, only weeks into his new role.

I became the new Sellafield chaplain just a few weeks before coronavirus hit. Sellafield's long had a chaplain service to those who need it – whether they are practicing Christians or not. But it had struggled to fill the vacancy created when the last chaplain left.

I discussed this with the Archdeacon. I am pleased to say that both he and the company supported this, and I have now started my role.

It's a voluntary position, which I combine with my day job as a team leader in Security and Resilience.

When I started, I didn't realise that coronavirus would come to impact on our lives as much as it has. This has meant things have been a little different. But it's also a perfect opportunity to introduce myself to the workforce, and to encourage people to get in touch. I offer a listening ear to anyone.

Our aim is to be present to everyone and walk alongside all employees in the

nuclear industry in West Cumbria, to encourage, support and offer pastoral care to those who need it.

There are already a number of fellowship groups that meet in the company, and this is great. These are a relaxed opportunity for people to come along and share their faith.

In fact, the Sellafield Workplace Chaplaincy is here for everyone in times of worry and anxiety. We don't mind if you don't go to church on Sundays, maybe you want to explore faith or you're not quite sure what you believe. We welcome everyone.

All conversations are treated in the strictest confidence.

Practical support can range from informal conversations, to signposting to other services, and even things like attending medical appointments with you.

[CMA blocks airline booking merger](#)

Among other products and services, Sabre and Farelogix supply software solutions which help airlines to sell flights via travel agents including those that operate online. Their IT solutions enable airlines to create add-ons to tickets sold through travel agents such as seats with extra leg room, WiFi and meals. Additionally, the 2 companies offer services to help airlines connect with passengers via travel agents.

Following [its in-depth "Phase 2" investigation](#), the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has found that Sabre's purchase of Farelogix could result in less innovation in their services, leading to fewer new features that may be released more slowly. Fees for certain products might also go up. As a result, airlines, travel agents and UK passengers would be worse off.

Farelogix has developed technology that allows airlines to offer more choice to passengers who purchase tickets from travel agents by way of customising their flight experience through, for example, booking specific meals or seats with extra leg room. Sabre does not currently offer this new technology but is investing in developing it. If Sabre were to buy Farelogix it will be unlikely to develop the technology itself. Airlines, and ultimately their passengers, will lose out from both this lack of innovation and the insufficient competition between the remaining companies in the market.

Additionally, Sabre is one of the main established businesses worldwide that airlines can use to connect to travel agents. The CMA has found that Farelogix offers airlines a good alternative. Sabre is also investing in its ability to better meet airlines' needs. The CMA considers that Farelogix's continued independence will likely help motivate Sabre to innovate further,

giving airlines more choices in connecting to travel agents that will allow tickets and extra products to be sold through travel agents in more innovative ways.

Martin Coleman, Chair of the CMA inquiry group, said:

The products and services that Sabre and Farelogix provide ultimately affect many passengers flying in and out of the UK. The two companies are helping drive technological change in this industry and we are concerned that the merger will see airlines and their UK passengers miss out on the benefits from continued innovation.

We recognise that our decision in this inquiry comes at a time of uncertainty and disruption in the global travel industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It remains important that we protect competition among businesses that provide services to airlines and the benefits such competition can bring for airlines and passengers. We never take decisions to block mergers lightly and in this case the evidence of harm is clear.

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) carried out a separate review and took Sabre and Farelogix to court to block the merger on the basis of concerns in one of the two areas where the CMA has found problems. On 7 April, the US District Court of Delaware decided to clear the deal, with the DOJ free to appeal that decision. The CMA's job is to protect competition in the UK for the benefit of UK consumers and its processes, and grounds for assessment, are different to those in the USA.

For more information, visit the [Sabre / Farelogix merger inquiry](#) web page.

For media queries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

Don't call us – we'll call you

Instead, a bolstered frontline team will proactively call claimants if they need to check any of the information provided as part of the claim, as well as messaging them on their online journal to confirm details.

The move is designed to take some of the worry and frustration out of submitting a claim, while speeding it up by putting an end to long call wait times.

The change is a response to the huge volume of calls to Universal Credit phone lines, which meant some people were faced with an engaged tone when

calling or were left waiting for several hours.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Therese Coffey said:

We are doing whatever it takes to make claiming benefits as straightforward as possible during a time when we are receiving an unprecedented number of claims.

That's why no one making a new claim to Universal Credit needs to call us.

Once you've completed your online application, you can rest assured we have received your claim and we will call you if we need to check any of the information you've given us.

Since 16 March 2020, more than a million new claims for Universal Credit have been processed, and 10,000 staff are being redeployed to help on the frontline. A rapid recruitment drive has been launched for an additional 5,000 to aid the effort.

Already, DWP staff have been making proactive calls where they can see people haven't been able to get through.

Already working through weekends, the DWP team will continue to make calls over the Easter bank holiday weekend, helping people complete their online claims and making sure the safety net catches those who need help.

This change goes further, putting the emphasis on the department to follow up with claimants if more information is needed – although anyone who is unable to get online can still call the department as normal.

Appropriate measures to protect people from fraud have been put in place to safeguard the new process. DWP will never ask you for your bank details over the phone and people should never give out personal information unless they are sure it is DWP calling.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

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