

Billions of pounds of support helps businesses up and down the country

More than 1.4 billion loans have supported businesses and protected jobs across all sectors. The figures show that the retail and construction sectors have benefitted the most, demonstrating how government support is helping those impacted hardest by the pandemic.

Support has been spread across the country, with regions receiving loans proportionately to the amount of businesses located there. This shows that government support is helping those who need it. These loans are in addition to furlough, the self-employment income support scheme and business grants, as part of the government's unprecedented £280 billion support package to protect jobs during the pandemic.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, said:

Throughout this crisis, we have provided more than £280 billion of support to protect jobs and livelihoods up and down the country.

We are committed to continuing to ensure jobs are protected and opportunity is created.

Companies right across the UK have benefitted from support through government-backed loans, including Preston cheesemaker, Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire Cheese, who took out a CBILS loan to support their firm.

Graham Kirkham, director of Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire Cheese, said:

Once I found out our loan had been approved, the relief was immense. The funding, combined with the help and publicity we received, has really helped us to get through the past few weeks. We were able to join a box scheme run by Neal's Yard in collaboration with Jamie Oliver that allowed cheese producers like us to supply customers directly.

Without the money, it's highly likely we wouldn't have been able to continue and our three-generation family business would've ceased to exist, through no fault of our own.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

These figures show very clearly that we have delivered on the solemn promise we made to support businesses across every part of the UK.

While there are still tough times ahead, we will continue to offer all the support we can to protect jobs and keep businesses afloat so we can look to not only restart our economy, but build back better from the pandemic.

At the start of winter, the Chancellor announced that more than a million businesses who took out a Bounce Back Loan will now receive further protection from the Covid crisis through flexible repayments, under the new Pay as You Grow system, which gives businesses more time to repay. Since then, the government has extended the loans schemes until March, and given businesses the ability to 'top-up' their loans if they need to.

The government has invested more than £280 billion throughout the pandemic to protect millions of jobs and businesses, including extending the self-employed and furlough schemes through to April to give businesses the certainty they need to plan over the coming months. This includes the £4.6 billion the Chancellor announced last week in one-off top up grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses worth up to £9,000 per property to help businesses through to the spring.

Further information

CBILS

Region	Value of loan offered (£)	Number of loans offered
East Midlands	1,297,778,540	5,273
East of England	1,766,950,464	7,460
London	3,847,934,021	12,495
North East	493,314,081	1,994
North West	1,959,152,472	7,563
Northern Ireland	496,806,683	1,501
Scotland	982,517,603	4,144
South East	2,824,103,231	11,260
South West	1,534,026,632	6,416
Wales	503,355,434	2,228
West Midlands	1,486,023,928	6,077
Yorkshire and The Humber	1,260,361,190	5,415
Unspecified	67,328,939	190

Bounce Back Loans

Region	Value of Loans Offered (£)	Number of Loans Offered
East Midlands	2,684,725,529	91,348
East of England	4,192,234,249	137,741
London	9,946,815,769	295,692
North East	1,249,741,795	44,858
North West	4,512,329,695	152,188
Northern Ireland	1,172,538,374	38,181

Region	Value of Loans Offered (£)	Number of Loans Offered
Scotland	2,496,404,756	86,062
South East	6,018,627,864	199,574
South West	3,275,798,746	116,063
Wales	1,524,813,850	55,094
West Midlands	3,520,737,158	114,715
Yorkshire and The Humber	2,986,264,487	101,197
Unspecified	62,547,705	2,017

Qualifications review consultation response

Ofqual supports the government's intention to increase confidence in level 3 qualifications, ensuring that there are clear opportunities for learners to progress from high quality qualifications into skilled employment or further study. Independent regulation will play a critical role, both in achieving this intention and ensuring an effective qualifications market is available to learners.

This response was sent to the Department for Education on Monday 4 January 2021.

Secure video calls help all prisoners maintain essential family ties during pandemic

- over 90,000 calls made so far, connecting families in the UK and overseas
- technology helped teenager communicate again with his deaf mother and allowed a prisoner to meet his baby for the first time

Secure video calls are now running in all public and private prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) across England and Wales, helping to maintain vital family ties and boost rehabilitation during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Offenders with strong family ties are less likely to reoffend, which costs the taxpayer around £18 billion per year, while 97% of prisoners say that

video calls have a positive impact on their mental health.

With the final installation of video call technology taking place last month, in just over 6 months, over 90,000 video calls have been made totalling almost 45,000 hours and connecting families in more than 100 countries, while social visits were suspended to help reduce the spread of the virus, save lives and protect the NHS.

The secure video calls are allowing prisoners to see their toddlers take their first steps, say goodbye to a terminally-ill loved one and helping those struggling with their mental health.

Prisons Minister Lucy Frazer QC MP said:

Video calls have been a huge success in our response to COVID-19 in the prison estate, with staff and offenders overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the technology.

Prisoners have seen drastic changes to their daily routines to save lives and to protect local health services. Part of that has been the loss of social visits – something we know plays a huge role in prisoners' wellbeing and rehabilitation and these calls are allowing them to keep this vital family contact.

The video calls take place on secure laptops in a designated area in each prison. Safeguards are in place to prevent misuse with all participants checked in advance, calls are monitored by prison staff and restrictions have been built into the software to ensure safe use.

Graham Barrett, Governor at HMP Wandsworth said:

Video calls have been an incredibly positive step forward in what has been a very difficult time. It has revolutionised the way that people can communicate with loved ones and having such a user-friendly service has ensured that the men in our care can keep in touch with family and friends all over the world.

A Prisoner at HMP Thorn Cross said:

It has been a complete game-changer for me. I can't imagine not seeing my children for the past nine months, so the peace of mind of knowing that they are ok, and for them to see me and know that I am ok has really helped all of us.

My family do not live locally, so I would like to continue to use video calling to speak to them, even after visits and ROTL are running again.

The new technology builds on the [2017 Lord Farmer review](#) which found that close bonds between prisoners and family members can significantly reduce their risk of reoffending.

Plans are being implemented for the long-term. In the meantime, video calls remain in place for prisoners and their loved-ones while social visits are restricted.

Notes to editors

- Video calls are a complementary resource to help maintain family contact not a replacement for social visits and where face-to-face visits can safely be delivered and remain the preference, no prisoner will be asked to substitute that for a video call.
- Time-limited calls are made either by prisoners making a call request to their designated contact or by families who can request a time slot through a mobile app or directly with the establishment.
- In March the government introduced temporary restrictions in prisons to prevent the virus taking hold – a decision that has saved the lives of staff, prisoners and children in custody, and protected the NHS.
- These measures, backed by Public Health England, included:
 - Creating distinct areas where vulnerable prisoners can shield, the symptomatic can isolate, and new arrivals can quarantine
 - Creating an additional 1,200 temporary cells so people are better able to social distance and we can limit the spread of infection
 - Making important adjustments to prison life – including placing prisoners in social ‘bubbles’ so they could safely spend more time out of their cells for vital education, work, and exercise
- We are further bolstering our defences to reduce the risk of transmission by:
 - Temporarily stopping social visits for adult prisoners in line with the new national restrictions. However, visits for compassionate reasons, visits to children in custody and official or legal visits will continue.
 - Introducing routine testing of frontline staff and prisoners who arrive from court or transfer from other jails to catch infections earlier.
 - Making more Personal Protective Equipment available to staff who come into close contact with offenders, so they can protect themselves and the offenders in their care.

New Every Mind Matters campaign

A new survey, commissioned by Public Health England (PHE) at the start of the current government restrictions, reveals the impact coronavirus (COVID-19) has had on adults' mental wellbeing across the country.

The research found that almost half (49%) felt that the pandemic has impacted negatively on their mental health and wellbeing (53% of women and 45% of men). Of those surveyed, significant proportions of the population said they had been experiencing more anxiety (46%), stress (44%), sleep problems (34%) and low mood (46%) over the course of the pandemic. The following were the most common reasons people thought the lockdown had negatively impacted their mental health:

- 56% missing friends and family; and loneliness 33%
- 53% uncertainty about the future; with financial and employment worries 27%
- 53% worried about family's safety and health

However, at the same time 3 in 5 (60%) of those asked say they feel hopeful about the future. Many adults (75%) reported that they are planning to take or have taken steps to look after their mental wellbeing, with exercising regularly (32%) eating well (29%) and talking more to family and friends (28%) being the main actions.

To support people during this time, PHE has launched a nationwide Better Health – Every Mind Matters campaign to support people to take action to look after their mental health and wellbeing and help support others such as family and friends. The campaign encourages people to get a free [NHS-approved Mind Plan](#) from the [Every Mind Matters website](#). By answering 5 simple questions, adults will get a personalised action plan with practical tips to help them deal with stress and anxiety, boost their mood, sleep better and feel more in control. Over 2.6 million Mind Plans have been created since it launched in October 2019.

The [Every Mind Matters COVID-19 hub](#) also includes practical tips and support on how adults can deal with uncertainty, how to cope with money and job worries and how to look after both their own and their family's mental wellbeing while staying at home.

The campaign is supported by a coalition of leading mental health charities, including Mind, Samaritans, Young Minds and Rethink.

Clare Perkins, Director of the Mental Health Programme at PHE said:

While the experience of the pandemic has been different for everyone, there's no doubt it has caused unprecedented challenges, and, not surprisingly, many of us are now experiencing poorer mental wellbeing.

Stress, anxiety and worry are very natural feelings in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak, and looking after our mental wellbeing has never been more important. The good news is that our Every Mind Matters COVID-19 resources have lots of excellent practical tips and advice, and I'd encourage you to get a free NHS Mind Plan, which will give you simple steps to help you navigate these challenging times.

Minister for Mental Health, Nadine Dorries, said:

It is understandable that many of us will be feeling fed up, worried and anxious about the weeks ahead. For most, these feelings will subside as we draw on our own resilience, adapt to new circumstances and take comfort from the hope of better days ahead. However, there are simple steps we can all be taking to improve our mental wellbeing.

Every Mind Matters' mental health resources include tailored advice, as well as practical tips on sleep and self-care. It enables you to create your own 'Mind Plan' by answering 5 simple questions to receive tips and practical advice tailored to you.

Whoever you are and whatever your situation, you are not alone and if you are struggling, there is support out there so I urge you to reach out and ask for help.

Dr. Max Pemberton, who is supporting the campaign, comments:

With all the changes going on in our lives, it can create a stressful time which will affect us all to some extent – but there are ways we can manage this uncertainty; reducing stress and helping us to cope better. Better Health – Every Mind Matters is there to support us and can equip us with the tips and advice to improve our mental wellbeing especially while we're at home. Advice including reframing your thoughts, focusing on the short term and finding a new rhythm, in the form of a new routine, is a powerful way to deal with uncertainty. You must remember that throughout all this, you are not alone – speak to your family and friends and we can continue to stay in good mental wellbeing throughout this lockdown.

The research also revealed differences in the negative mental health impacts the pandemic is having on younger people. Those aged 18 to 34 are more likely to report that COVID-19 has caused them more stress (51%) and made them feel more lonely (43%).

To support this age group, the campaign has sought the support of celebrities including footballer Wayne Bridge, Bridgerton actress Phoebe Dynevor, presenter Vick Hope and Celebs Go Dating receptionist Tom Read Wilson. The supporters all recognise the importance of helping people improve their mental wellbeing during these uncertain times and have spoken openly about their own personal experiences of mental health and the steps they are taking to look after their own wellbeing.

Better Health – Every Mind Matters also offers information and videos to help young people look after their own mental health and provides dedicated support to help parents and guardians look after the mental wellbeing of the

children and young people they care for.

For those who are struggling with anxiety or depression, NHS talking therapies are here to help. NHS mental health services have been open throughout the pandemic and continue to stay open during this lockdown. Speak to your GP for a referral, or you can self-refer via nhs.uk/talk. NHS mental health staff can provide care via phone or online from the comfort of your home. Face to face appointments can also be arranged in many areas. These services are a free, and a confidential way to get effective help.

If you or a loved one face a mental health crisis, you can find your local NHS 24/7 helpline on nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth.

For further information about the campaign or to set up interviews with case studies or PHE spokespeople, please contact:

Foreign Secretary statement: Arrest of Alexey Navalny

Press release

The Foreign Secretary has responded to the arrest of Alexey Navalny by the Russian authorities



It is appalling that Alexey Navalny, the victim of a despicable crime, has been detained by Russian authorities. He must be immediately released.

Rather than persecuting Mr Navalny Russia should explain how a chemical weapon came to be used on Russian soil.