

# 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](https://www.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](https://www.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.

Published 18 January 2021

---

## [Act now to keep your business moving in 2021, Business Minister urges](#)

- Firms urged to ensure they have ticked off checklist of six key actions, as UK begins its new start outside of the EU
- Business Minister warns “Business is changing: you must not delay any

further”

- Department launches series of on demand videos – on subjects ranging from trade to data – to help companies understand the new rules

As the UK embarks on its new start as an independent trading nation, Business Minister Paul Scully has set out six key actions businesses must take to ensure they can seize all the opportunities on the horizon.

The zero tariff, zero quota trade deal the UK has struck with the European Union will help unlock investment and protect jobs across the United Kingdom and will allow businesses to benefit from new trade deals with partners all around the world.

However, there are a range of actions businesses must take in order to take advantage of these opportunities outside the customs union and single market. Today, Minister Scully is urging businesses who have not yet taken steps to prepare for the UK’s new start to act now to avoid any potential disruption to their operations.

Business Minister Paul Scully said:

The UK is finally out of the EU single market and customs union, and business is changing.

Many businesses have made great strides to get ready for the UK’s new start, but we know some are further behind. To avoid any potential disruption to your business, you must not delay – make your final preparations now.

The government will be here to help businesses navigate this change. You can use this checklist, watch our on demand videos, or visit [gov.uk/transition](https://gov.uk/transition) to get personalised advice.

The six key actions many firms may need to take are:

1. Goods – if you import or export goods to the EU, you must get an EORI number, make customs declarations or employ an agent to do them for you, check if your goods require extra papers (like plant or animal products) and speak to the EU business you’re trading with to make sure they’re completing the right EU paperwork. There are also special rules that apply to Northern Ireland. Hauliers must obtain a Kent Access Permit and have a negative Covid test before they head to port in Kent
2. Services – if you deliver services to the EU, you must check whether your professional qualification is recognised by the appropriate EU regulator
3. People – if you need to hire skilled staff from the EU, you must apply

to become a licensed sponsor

4. Travel – if you need to travel to the EU for business, you must check whether you need a visa or work permit
5. Data – if your goods are protected by Intellectual Property (IP), you will need to check the new rules for parallel exporting IP protected goods from the UK to the EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. You risk infringing on IP rights if you do not follow the new rules
6. Accounting & Reporting – if your business has a presence in the EU you may need to change how you undertake accounting and reporting to ensure compliance with the relevant requirements

These six key actions should act as a guide for every business affected by the new rules, with more detailed, personalised advice available through the checker tool on [gov.uk/transition](https://gov.uk/transition).

To further support firms, today (Monday 18 January), the Business Department has launched a series of new, on demand videos to help businesses familiarise themselves with the new rules, which will be available via [gov.uk/transition](https://gov.uk/transition). Topics include importing and exporting, trade, data, and audit and accounting.

Businesses can select which videos to view from the list, or can choose their sector and see videos that are recommended for them.

Many actions related to EU exit needed to have been taken regardless of the outcome of negotiations, and are therefore unaffected by the trade deal the UK has negotiated with the EU. However, in some areas, such as tariffs and audit and accounting, there is new guidance that businesses will need to familiarise themselves with.

The Business Support Helpline (0800 098 1098) is a free service operating across England. It can provide information on a wide range of business issues, including starting up, business continuity, growth and access to finance, including the range of business support available from Government. Similar services are available in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.