

Business Secretary calls with business Leaders: 11 January 2021

News story

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng hosted a series of calls with business leaders on his first day in office.



Following his appointment as Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on 8 January, Kwasi Kwarteng this afternoon hosted a virtual meeting with some of the UK's leading business representative organisations: the British Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry, Federation of Small Businesses, The Institute of Directors and Make UK.

The Business Secretary opened the call by acknowledging the extraordinary pressures that British businesses are facing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and promised to be a champion of business and workers at the Cabinet table and across government. He thanked the 5 organisations for continuing to promote the government's support measures to their members, and praised businesses for playing its part in helping to defeat the virus, including those working on vaccine manufacturing and deployment, and those working to maintain essential services in a COVID-secure way to keep the country moving.

The Business Secretary set out his priorities for the year ahead, noting that there was clear cause for optimism with both vaccines and a trade agreement with the European Union now secured. He called on businesses to work with government to take advantage of our new-found sovereignty as an independent trading nation to drive prosperity and economic growth for all, as well as the government's Plan for Jobs.

The Business Secretary reaffirmed the government's commitment to build back better from the pandemic by making Britain the best country in the world to start and grow a business and unleashing a new wave of investment to create jobs and level up economic activity. He also discussed the vital importance of delivering on the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial

Revolution, reaching our legally-binding target of net zero emissions by 2050, and unleashing innovation across all four nations of the UK, cementing the country's position as a science superpower while building the foundations for the new industries of tomorrow.

The Business Secretary also held a number of bi-lateral calls with leading British employers today and will continue to have further calls throughout this week.

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[The RPA delivers best ever December payment performance](#)

The [Rural Payments Agency \(RPA\)](#) has delivered its best ever December payment performance and paid just under 98% of Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) claims despite the challenges caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. Payments during December were made to around 82,500 eligible claimants and were worth more than £1.77 billion in total, making it the best performance since the scheme opened in 2015.

In addition the RPA brought forward more full Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Environmental Stewardship (ES) payments in December, with just under 68% of eligible CS revenue and just over 57% of ES claims paid, totalling £67 million. There was also an increase in the number of CS 2021 agreements issued with over 63% of applicants receiving their offers by the end of the year.

RPA Chief Executive, Paul Caldwell, said:

We understand how important our services are to farmers and land managers across the country and I'm pleased that we have been able to show year on year improvements.

It has been a difficult year for many and I am pleased that we have shown our commitment to agricultural and rural communities, and to those that have kept the nation fed during such challenging times.

After a difficult year the RPA extended further support to customers by delivering a range of services to agricultural and rural communities across the country while the majority of staff worked from home.

Earlier in the year the RPA supported the [Dairy Response Fund](#). As some dairy farmers faced financial difficulties and excess milk due to the coronavirus outbreak and the closure of hospitality, the new fund provided grants of up to £10,000 to help dairy farmers most in need of support to sustain their business and maintain animal welfare. Working closely with Farming Help Organisations the RPA implemented enhanced support measures for vulnerable farmers that allowed them to submit their paperwork in a timely manner.

The agency also issued 236 eligible agreements under the Flood Recovery Fund worth £1.7 million to support farmers who suffered uninsurable damage to their property in the devastating floods in November 2019.

In light of the disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak the RPA took the decision to extend the window to submit applications for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and make a claim for Countryside Stewardship (CS), Environmental Stewardship (ES) and woodland legacy revenue payments by one month. This gave farmers and their agents an extra month to submit applications and claims, helping them to avoid penalties for late applications.

Through the launch of the third round of the popular Countryside Productivity Small Grants scheme worth £25m, the RPA helped rural businesses invest in equipment, technology and infrastructure that will not only boost productivity, but also deliver significant environmental benefits. This means that £60 million has been allocated to farmers investing in technology to boost their productivity since the scheme opened in 2018.

This effort to improve and simplify the way the agency delivers for its customers will continue throughout the Agricultural Transition Period as the RPA will be at the forefront of this change in agricultural policy. It will support the opening of the applications for the Environmental Land Management scheme National Pilot – the cornerstone for developing and co-designing the final Environmental Land Management scheme.

The launch of the National Pilot in late 2021 will involve up to 5,500 farmers over a three-year period and will build on the lessons from the 68 live tests and trials being carried out by farmers across England to assess how the fundamental building blocks of the scheme will work on the ground. This will ensure that the new scheme delivers for our farmers and land managers, as well as delivering greener, cleaner landscapes and reversing the decline of some of our most cherished species.

An improved Countryside Stewardship scheme will open to applications for 2022 agreements in early February 2021 – an important stepping stone for many farmers ahead of the full roll-out of the future Environmental Land Management scheme, expected in late 2024.

Steps will be taken to simplify the administration of the scheme, making it easier for more people to take part whilst it remains open to new applications for the first few years of the agricultural transition period. This will help them to springboard into the future scheme, which will reward them for delivering environmental outcomes, such as those already paid for by

the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

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[UK launches Global Health Insurance](#)

Card

- UK's new Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) launched as part of UK / EU deal
- Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) will gradually replace existing European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC)

UK residents will now be able to apply for a UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC), the government announced today.

Under Britain's new agreement with the EU, UK residents' rights to emergency and medically necessary healthcare will continue when travelling in the EU. This includes medically necessary treatment for a pre-existing or chronic condition.

Current European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) are valid as long as they are in date and people can continue to use these when travelling to the EU.

The public only need to apply for their new GHIC when their current EHIC expires. Both cards will offer equivalent protection for emergency and medically necessary healthcare needs when in the EU on a temporary stay, which includes holiday, study and business travel.

The new GHIC card is free to obtain from the [official GHIC website](#). People should apply at least 2 weeks before they plan to travel to ensure their card arrives on time.

Minister for Health Edward Argar said:

Our deal with the EU ensures the right for our citizens to access necessary healthcare on their holidays and travels to countries in the EU will continue.

The GHIC is a key element of the UK's future relationship with the EU and will provide certainty and security for all UK residents.

Cover for emergency and medically necessary healthcare is part of a wider healthcare agreement struck with the EU that will see continued cooperation on healthcare for UK residents.

If a UK resident is travelling without a card, they are still entitled to necessary healthcare and should contact the NHS Business Services Authority (NHS BSA) (which covers the whole of the UK), who can arrange for payment should they require treatment when abroad.

EU member state EHICs will continue to be accepted by the NHS.

Alongside the deal with the EU, the UK is open to agreeing further reciprocal healthcare arrangements that can support UK residents when they travel.

The government always advises that anyone travelling overseas, whether to the EU or elsewhere in the world, should take out comprehensive travel insurance.

Background information

All UK residents are eligible to apply for a GHIC which will be valid and recognised in the EU.

GHIC is free via the [official website](#). Any sites which include a charging fee are in no way affiliated with the official NHSBSA GHIC service.

The government recognises sensitivities around flags in Northern Ireland. As such, residents in Northern Ireland will be provided with an option to choose an alternative version of the GHIC card, which they will be able to apply for shortly. Keep checking www.nhs.uk/GHIC for updates.

Under existing Common Travel Area arrangements with Ireland, UK residents will continue to be able to access necessary healthcare in Ireland by showing proof of residency documentation (such as a UK driving licence, a biometric residence permit, or a Northern Irish medical card) or EHIC or GHIC as used elsewhere in the EU.

The GHIC covers medically necessary state-provided healthcare at a reduced cost or, in many cases, free of charge, until your planned return home.

A temporary stay is a period during which you are staying in a place other than the one where you usually live and you do not move your 'centre of interest' there. For example, this can include holiday, study and business travel.

Necessary healthcare means healthcare that becomes medically necessary during your stay and for which you cannot reasonably wait until you're back in the UK to get. This includes medically necessary treatment for a pre-existing or chronic condition. Some treatments will need to be pre-arranged with the relevant healthcare provider in the country you're visiting, for example kidney dialysis or chemotherapy.

Necessary healthcare does not include healthcare that you travel specifically to receive, although individuals who want to seek planned treatment in a member state may be covered under the broader healthcare arrangements with the EU. Read more [information on planned treatments](#).

If a UK resident requires emergency or medically necessary treatment while in the EU, and doesn't have a GHIC or EHIC, a Provisional Replacement Certificate (PRC) can be obtained which will provide the same coverage for healthcare as GHIC or EHIC. The PRC can only be requested at the point of requiring care; it's not possible to request a PRC in advance of a trip. UK nationals can contact NHSBSA on +44 (0)191 218 1999 should a PRC be required.

UK nationals living in the EU, EEA and Switzerland and EU, EEA and Swiss nationals living in the UK, who are eligible under the Citizens' Rights Agreement for reciprocal healthcare based on current EU regulations, can continue to apply for an EHIC.

The UK is seeking to conclude new, comprehensive agreements on social security coordination, including reciprocal healthcare, with the EEA EFTA States and with Switzerland.

Until a new agreement is in place, the UK and Norway will apply, on a temporary basis, an amended version of the 1991 Convention on Social Security and Protocol on Medical Treatment between the governments of the UK and Norway. This includes necessary healthcare.

The rest-of-the-world (RoW) countries we currently have reciprocal healthcare agreements with are Australia, New Zealand, some Crown Dependencies and overseas territories (such as Isle of Mann, Jersey, Gibraltar), and some Balkan states (Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo). Different proofs of eligibility are required under these agreement. Read more [travel advice information](#).

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