

RESI Convention 2020

Introduction

Thanks, Mark.

It's good to be with you all. Despite the new national covid measures under which we're all living and preventing us from meeting in person today, and I hope we can do again next year, our mission remains the same – to build the homes the country needs – and that work continues despite all the other pressures on government.

I was resolute that the property market needed to be kept open at this difficult time – and it has been offered unique protections, being better supported than almost any other sector of the economy.

I hope you will see that at all levels of government, there is a recognition that building is one of the most important things we can possibly be doing. To create and sustain jobs, to make housing more affordable for the young and those on lower incomes and to level up by encouraging investment in those parts of the country which have seen too little of it in recent decades and ensuring good quality, safe, and attractive homes are available to all in the United Kingdom.

We recognise that the market needs to be considered as a complete ecosystem – covering construction, tradespeople – and in the residential property world, estate agents, removal companies, and solicitors.

People renting and buying can still move. Removal firms and estate agents and lettings agents can still operate. Tradespeople like plumbers and electricians can still enter homes. And, crucially, construction can and should continue.

Because we know that your industry is an engine of growth – and both the backbone and the beating heart of our economy. We have tried everything we can to keep the sector going. Recent industry trends have highlighted just how resilient the sector has proved in recent months.

The latest data from the taxman shows that in September, 84,480 homes sales were completed in England.

This represents an increase of 1.1% when compared to same month in 2019. Month-on-month, house sales are up by 16%, representing a considerable bounce back in transactions compared to more modest improvements last month.

The home sales pipeline is now 50% bigger than this time last year, with 140,000 more buyers rushing to beat the Chancellor's stamp duty holiday deadline. And a robust housing market is fuelling a September rebound of the construction sector too. The purchasing managers' index for construction rose to 56.8 in September. This is the fourth consecutive reading above 50, which

indicates the majority of businesses have reported improving activity.

But although we are building more homes and mortgage applications in the UK have surged to a 12-month high, we will continue to work with the sector to develop more products for first time buyers.

City centres / high streets

Commentators have been saying for years that we are living through a generational shift in the way we conceive of the interrelations between work, society and our surroundings.

They point to the changing landscape of town and city centres and high streets – the proliferation of boarded up buildings, the memories of old stores that struggled to compete with their online counterparts – and point to a profound rebalancing in the economy, and across society more generally.

The narrative is one of a world that has gone digital, leaving communities behind. Its an argument that has been repackaged time and time again, that those market forces that we've been living through are now accelerating at break neck speed. Zoom and Microsoft Teams have moved the goalposts, meaning that after this is all over, many will never go back to life as normal, and will continue to work remotely.

And data suggests that as the line blurs between home and workspace, our expectations of what we want from our homes also changes.

A recent report from RightMove said that homebuyers are escaping cities, with searches for homes in small towns and villages doubling, with people looking for more space for their home during the lockdown.

It's too early to say with real confidence how much change we'll see in the years ahead. Many people undoubtedly want to go back to work, and productivity, creativity, and moments of inspiration are easier to come by when people are brought together. Hundreds of years of urbanisation are unlikely to be unwound so quickly, people enjoy living in cities and towns where they can enjoy the wonderful hospitality, leisure and culture that we have in many great cities and towns.

This is particularly true for younger people – who when working from home are less able to benefit from training and mentoring opportunities that arise from office spaces, and who bear the brunt of the inequality of the situation, many working at the end of their bed in a cramped studio apartment or house-share.

There are clear advantages of working from home – I've enjoyed seeing the range of virtual backgrounds people choose on their work calls, and working from home of course means more time with my family.

But at the office, there is no risk of my 3 daughters and our puppy running into the room knocking over the laptop.

There are changes that we are all aware of – rapid technological leaps that are reforming and disrupting industries and supply chains, and high streets are transforming to meet that challenge.

Their ongoing transformation has the potential to be as significant as any change since the Second World War, or even since the motor car led to the widespread reconfiguration of modern urban spaces.

It is a challenge that requires real depth of imagination and vision to ensure the health and prosperity of communities.

We are working towards more repurposing of space for mixed use but we want that to be done sensitively, avoiding the mistakes previous generations have made, avoiding the casual loss of buildings and heritage and ensuring no new dislocated communities are created.

We are doing this through further investment in our high streets and town centres, through our £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

We've already brought forward a lot of investment since our pandemic, through our Getting Building Fund which has committed £900 million to 'shovel ready' projects in this financial year – bringing with it much needed investment and jobs as they try to adapt and evolve to new circumstances.

At the start of the pandemic I recognised the importance of these questions would pose and started to talk about placemaking and identity. It became a focus of the planning reforms we brought forward.

In particular, I wanted to provide high streets with the flexibility they need to adapt to these modern realities, giving property owners the ability to plan for the future, and reflecting the desire for more flexible working space and outdoor areas.

By the summer, we had already reformed the Use Class Order, making it easier for property owners to adapt and evolve their businesses.

The pandemic has highlighted that these freedoms – important as they are – also need to be tempered by protections, to make sure that people can truly benefit from the changes, which is why I announced last month that homes delivered through Permitted Development Rights must meet national space standards.

New planning laws that offer the flexibility to deliver new mixed use properties and this will be a critical element in meeting the Prime Minister's central objective of building 1 million homes over the course of this parliament.

Housing delivery

When it comes to house-building – with your help, we were making excellent progress before the pandemic. Last year we built more new homes than at any time in the last 31 years, taking the total delivered since 2010 to 1.5

million homes. The proportion of young homeowners increased after declining for more than a decade.

I want us to be a country that builds, that sees previous years as the starting point which we can exceed. I take heart that through the pandemic, the market has proven more resilient and robust than many would have predicted, and we in government have tried to support this: extending construction working hours, cutting stamp duty at the beginning of summer, and bringing forward a £400 million brownfield fund to get building in our core cities and urban areas not simply on greenfield sites and rural areas.

Following the announcement of the new £12.2 billion Affordable Homes Programme at Budget, the biggest investment in affordable housing in a decade, last month Homes England launched their prospectus for bids.

This aims to deliver up to 180,000 affordable homes over 5 years across the country, and will ensure more of those homes are built outside of London and the South East than its predecessor pushing investment into the Midlands and the North that has seen too little of it in recent decades.

And around half of homes will be for ownership, with the vast majority of these available through a new, more accessible model of Shared Ownership.

Much-needed changes that will help bridge the gap between renting and home ownership.

This will also be the first programme following the introduction of the Right to Shared Ownership – our new scheme which will give most housing association tenants the opportunity to buy a stake in their home using the new model for Shared Ownership, should their personal circumstances allow. Being a social tenant is the first rung on the ladder to ownership should someone want to take those steps.

But there's a lot of uncertainty over what lies ahead – over what happens next with the virus, despite the recent good news with respect to the vaccine and mass testing in Liverpool, and the recovery of the economy.

But I am resolute that construction and the housing market will continue to be a central pillar of our economy and great supporter of jobs. There's no other part of the economy which contributes to creating and sustaining jobs and every economic recovery in my lifetime has seen housebuilding and construction as a central element to that recovery plans. We will keep building and build back better – delivering the homes people need, and ensuring those who dream of owning a home of their own are able to do so.

Planning reform

With this in mind, the Prime Minister and I have set out a new vision for radical reform, starting with our planning system which, for decades, has failed to deliver the homes we need.

The planning system has its flaws it's a system that doesn't deliver enough

homes, it doesn't deliver them fast enough and doesn't allow us to develop a competitive housing market to ensure smaller businesses can prosper and the houses being built, for many people, are of insufficient quality and not sufficiently beautiful nor sustainable.

Local building plans were supposed to help. Yet they take on average 7 years to agree in the form of lengthy and absurdly complex documents and accompanying policies.

It takes an average of 5 years for a substantial housing development to go through the planning system before a spade is even in the ground. That is too long and putting too many broader objectives at a society are being put at risk. The proposals we set out is for a more faster, transparent, predictable approach and moving the planning system to a more interactive and digital one rooted in the 2st century.

Centred on good design and place-making and a more harmonious relationship between the built and natural environments.

Developer contributions

We're saying that those who build these homes and those who benefit from building them to contribute more to the infrastructure around the homes being built.

Our proposed Infrastructure Levy will simplify the system through a nationally-set, value-based flat rate charge, making it more streamlined and transparent – a welcome break from the merry-go-round of negotiations and renegotiations that render our current system so inefficient and leads to little public trust in its outcomes.

The new Levy will aim to raise more revenue than at present by capturing a greater share of the land value uplift – a decision we made explicitly to ensure that the system supports the infrastructure and affordable housing needed to create strong, mixed communities and to give local people more confidence that housing will give more benefits to them and their children.

It's an approach that provides greater certainty and clarity all round; giving developers the confidence to bring forward innovative and ambitious plans for new development, safe in the knowledge that their efforts won't be wasted or arbitrarily rejected.

Communities, too, can be confident that they will benefit from development.

A more diverse market

The new approach also, vitally, opens up the system to new builders. This is one of our core objectives, having more diverse, competitive planning system and house building market.

Thirty years ago, small builders accounted for 40% of new build homes. This has since fallen to just 12%. SMEs are vital for long-term housing delivery.

Between 2010 and 2018, they were responsible for the creation of around 140,000 jobs.

Self-build and modular construction techniques have also struggled to gain a foothold.

This is bad not just for housing delivery, but also for the innovation and competition for the productivity of the UK economy. We want to make the UK a world leader and see the businesses taking root in the Midlands and the North grow, thrive, build more of those homes and see more of the product they rely on manufactured in the UK.

Last week I announced a review of the law to make it easier for people dreaming of building their own home – an industry estimated to be worth almost £4.5 billion to the British economy. Currently there are around 15,000 of these types of homes built every year – an increase of 50% in 2 years, we want to go further than that encouraging local councils to bring forward serviced plots wherever they can.

Our determination to increase the housing supply is rooted in this government's longstanding belief that we have a duty to help people onto the housing ladder, and to help those who get onto the ladder. One issue that we are tackling is the growing problem of newly built houses being sold as leasehold rather than freehold.

This government is committed to bringing forward leasehold reform in order to outlaw unfair practices that have given leasehold a very bad name and left many leaseholders in a difficult position.

Earlier this year the Law Commission published a number of reports setting out how we could make the process of enfranchisement simpler and easier, improve the position of leaseholders more generally and embed commonhold as a more established tenure.

We will shortly be responding to this report – setting out the reform government will take forward and we intend to reform leasehold to cut unnecessary costs, uncertainty and complexity to make the process of enfranchisement as simple as possible for leaseholders. And to ensure that common hold is made a reality for more and more people. We'll legislate to ban new leasehold homes at least, and reduce ground rents to zero.

Homes of all tenures / home ownership

The truth is that too many young people, families and others will continue to be trapped paying high rents, being priced out of putting down roots where they grew up, where they live and work, if we don't act.

That's why we're building more homes, that's why we're reforming the planning system, that's why we've brought forward the biggest affordable homes programme in 10 years and that's why we're bringing forward our First Homes initiative – something I think could be life-changing.

Under this scheme, local first-time buyers can buy homes at a discount of at least 30% in their local communities, with councils able to put key workers at the front of the queue.

Where property prices are highest, the discount could be as high as 50%.

It will apply to the new home forever, locking in that home for first time buyers in perpetuity.

We're accelerating the roll out of First Homes with a 1,500-home pilot, funded by the new Affordable Homes Programme and setting an expectation that 25% of the affordable homes delivered through developer contributions will be First Homes in the future.

Rough sleeping

That commitment to build more affordable homes very much includes homes for the most vulnerable in society.

They have been our priority throughout the pandemic and it's fair to say that the way we have protected people sleeping rough is essentially and widely regarded as among the best in the world. Our everyone in programme helped 29,000 of the most vulnerable people off the streets and into safe accommodation, a huge tribute to the local councils and charities involved in that initiative.

We're building on that through the new Protect Programme, which provides a further £15 million to help councils that need extra support ensure that everyone sleeping rough has somewhere safe to go during the current restrictions and over the winter.

Helping us both protect people from the virus and move forward with our goal of ending rough sleeping.

The programme is part of significant ongoing efforts – backed by over £700 million funding for homelessness and rough sleeping this year alone – including building or renovating 3,300 new homes for rough sleepers, the biggest injection of cash to acquire this type of property since the early 1990s, creating a new national asset for those people who come off the street can be moved into good quality accommodation as they begin to build their lives

The Prime Minister and I are determined that it will be this parliament that brings rough sleeping to an end and reduces the number of rough sleepers on our street to the absolute minimum.

Lockdown and economic support

While we continue to face testing times, our ambitions and optimism for the future remain high. The vaccine breakthrough is welcome news.

But as the Prime Minister has said, it is still very early days and we need

to remain focused on following the rules to keep people safe and limit the economic damage.

We have faced dark days before as a country and have always been able to build back better.

I have every confidence we will do so again; with the housing market once again leading the charge, backed by a once in a generation set of planning reforms that promise to transform, backed by greater investment.

I look forward to working with you to make these changes a success to support your industry in every way that we possibly can and to meet up again in person once we put coronavirus behind us and are truly beginning to build back better.

John Whittingdale's Speech at Open Data Institute Summit 2020

I'd like to start by thanking the Open Data Institute for organising today's virtual summit and to all those who are going to take part in what I'm sure is going to be a really fascinating discussion.

I think all of us recognise that there is a vast potential for increasing the use of data in order to make things better, and to make society function better.

We're all familiar with the opportunities which the greater use of data brings for helping businesses to grow, and fuelling innovation.

But obviously it has been particularly in the course of the last six months that we have seen the benefits that data brings in tackling what is a global pandemic.

It is global – I was talking at a virtual conference in India just a few weeks ago, and one of the speakers raised the question then of how we would have coped with the Covid crisis if it had taken place just 5 or 6 years ago, when we didn't have the benefits that the internet has brought and digital technology.

So today we are familiar with how we can use those methods to communicate, as we are doing today; all of us have had to get used to Zoom calls and Teams meetings, and the rest.

But also how we've been able to survive with our schools closed, so our children have been able to be educated online, we've used it to communicate the vital messages we need to get across and also to provide entertainment to

people just to get them through what has obviously been a very difficult few months.

There is absolutely no question that digital technology and data use has been at the heart of our response to the pandemic.

But even before that, the government saw that there was an enormous potential from the greater use of data, the power that data and technology can bring – that was something we were thinking about quite carefully even before the present crisis arose. And the first challenge was to try to increase the use of data across government.

It's important that we set an example and demonstrate what can be achieved and there are lots of different examples I could give of how that has taken place.

But just to pick out one – law enforcement, for instance, might not have sufficient data in order to provide a context to understand both the national and local picture of domestic abuse, which is obviously something that is a huge challenge, particularly at the moment.

But what we've managed to do is use the data from the Office for National Statistics to draw together sources from a number of different data pictures, which have allowed us to understand much better how we can provide support to victims of abuse, and also a better understanding of the criminal justice system's response and what brings it about.

And in so many different areas of government activity, if we draw upon data sets which are already there but which perhaps have not been properly exploited, we can use those to increase understanding and ultimately to deliver better public services.

But it's not just about the use of data across government, it's about the use of data right across the economy in order to create a pro-innovation, pro-growth environment.

And that really is the purpose of our recently published National Data Strategy – to set out that ambitious agenda as to how we can better use data in order to fuel our economy, drive the recovery and rebuild after the crisis is behind us.

In talking about creating a pro-growth, pro-innovation environment, some people have suggested that that may be in conflict with the other priority, which is to build trust and ensure there are proper safeguards for people's privacy.

But actually I think the two are not in conflict at all – I think they are absolutely essential dual components.

Because one of the most important things, if we are to drive the greater use of data across the economy, people have to have confidence that their data is not going to be improperly used, it's not going to be stolen or exploited, and that they can be confident in the safeguards around privacy and data

protection.

So what we want to do is create an environment where data is appropriately usable and accessible across the economy, and to develop a policy framework to identify where data availability can support growth and innovation, and what the role of government in that should be.

We're already quite far advanced – the first tranche of research that we've been conducting into this has nearly been completed and that considers what the government should be doing to address market failures, which have meant that it has been harder to use data across the economy to promote growth.

And we'll now be tackling those market failures and conducting further research focused on data foundations to make sure that the data is findable, accessible, interoperable and can be used again.

And so the research that we are commissioning shortly will look at the importance of data foundations for the adoption of data-driven technologies like artificial intelligence in the private and third sectors, and it will consider what the role of government should be in supporting those better data foundations.

That work is going to be vital if we are to succeed in harnessing the power of data to boost productivity, to create new jobs and to improve public services.

Since we published the National Data Strategy, which is really an invitation to all the people who are taking part in our discussion today to contribute to the drawing up of the more detailed strategy, we've already been undertaking a number of discussions with individual stakeholders.

I suspect quite a few of the ones I've been talking to may be listening in to our discussion this afternoon.

But what we want to do is make this a truly cross-sector endeavour and already we've been encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment that we've found from those that we've been talking to.

So it is by engaging on those issues that I think we can start to understand what we need to do to meet our ambition that data and data use are seen as opportunities to be embraced rather than threats against which to be guarded.

And one of the things that has concerned me in the past is that if you look at the reporting about data in the popular press, in the national media, previously it was always about cyber hacking, phishing attacks, people wanting to steal data.

I mean that brings across the fact that data is very valuable, that's why there are people out there who want to steal it.

But the negative side has had too much attention – that's beginning to change I think, particularly in the last few months, where we've begun to see the benefits that data has brought in helping us to meet the pandemic.

But obviously we need to continue to get the message across that we need to have proper protections in place, that privacy is important but also we want to begin to highlight the huge benefits that better data use can bring to the economic wellbeing of the country.

So the discussions we've been having in the last few weeks have already given us invaluable feedback and helped us to refine the focus on the opportunities which data presents to us.

And that is something which obviously I'm keen to encourage in the coming months and I want to try to promote further the recognition that data use, if done properly, can bring real benefits.

We've seen one or two specific examples – open banking, for instance, has been an important first step in providing small businesses with access to markets that were once closed off and we need to continue to look at how we can do more in that area.

We've also begun a wider engagement campaign, which will reach out to a range of organisations, from small businesses to charities, with events from London to Newcastle, and we want to hear from all those who have a stake in this, from every part of the country.

And while those conversations have centred on our future growth and areas of opportunity, we've also heard questions around our plans to maintain a data regime that is future-proof and fit for purpose.

So we will not just want to realise the value of data through domestic action – we recognise very much that the flow of information across borders fuels global business operations, supply chains and trade, and powers growth right across the world.

So as we approach the end of the Transition Period in just a few weeks time and are no longer bound by European law, we want to champion the benefits that data can deliver and we will promote best practice and work with all our international partners to ensure that data is not inappropriately constrained by national borders and fragmented regulatory regimes.

That includes ensuring that cross-border flows of personal data can continue lawfully and uninterrupted.

Obviously the immediate issue here is whether or not we can continue to maintain the recognition of data adequacy with the European Union.

It is very much our ambition to achieve agreement with the EU that the UK remains data adequate, so that there is no impediment to the flow of data, both from this country to the EU, but also back from the EU to the UK.

We don't see any reason why we shouldn't get adequacy because our rules were originally framed by the EU and we don't intend to radically depart from that but that is something which obviously is controlled by the European Union Commission and the time for achieving an adequacy agreement is beginning to run short.

So whilst we still remain very hopeful, it is only sensible that we begin to put in place measures so that we're ready, should it not be possible to achieve an agreement by the end of the year.

So we've been talking to businesses right across the UK, to encourage them to put in place the alternative transfer mechanisms which are necessary if adequacy is not achieved and which will ensure that data transfers continue.

Our work with international partners is also continuing, not just in this regard but across a range of policy areas, and we are going to continue to engage in bilateral fora, in multilateral fora and looking for opportunities for cooperation, where the UK can be a force for good in the world.

And we already are taking a lead through our chair of the Digital Nations group, through our forthcoming presidency of the G7 and we want to make sure that digital and the opportunities for data are very much part of the agenda for these groups where we will be taking a lead.

So I think we are about to start a new chapter and the National Data Strategy begins to set out the ambition for that.

But it's very important that we receive responses to it and I know that the Open Data Institute and others are doing a lot of work in terms of research, in terms of bringing together evidence and pilots, and we look forward very much to continuing to have that conversation with all of you.

Because the National Data Strategy at this stage is a broad framework of the kind of ambitions but we still have a lot of work to do on the detail.

So the consultation on it is going to be open until 2 December 2020 and we are very keen to hear from right across the data community.

We will then be considering the feedback we get and in due course we will be producing a further iteration of the strategy.

Obviously these are very challenging times but it is becoming increasingly clear that the better use of data and digital technology lies absolutely at the heart of meeting those challenges, so now is exactly the right time to be focusing on that and the National Data Strategy is an excellent beginning for that.

So thank you for your invitation this afternoon and please, to all those on the call, we look forward to you responding, and we'll read with great interest what you have to say. Thank you.

36th Universal Periodic Review: UK statement on Jamaica



Thank you, Madam President,

The United Kingdom welcomes Jamaica's engagement with the UPR process, and we recognise the progress made in the area of media freedom.

However, we remain concerned by reports of abuses in the correctional system and the high rate of fatal shooting incidents involving the security services. We urge the Government to continue to work to reduce fatal shooting incidents, including by strengthening the Independent Commission of Investigations, and ensuring that the Jamaican correctional system adheres to international human rights standards.

We recommend that Jamaica:

1. Respond constructively to the anticipated Government Taskforce report on the long-term incarceration of mentally ill people in Jamaican prisons and address the systemic failures identified by the Independent Commission on Investigations;
2. Improve effectiveness of victim identification and support for victims of human trafficking by developing victim-centered, trauma-informed

procedures in law enforcement operations, investigations and criminal justice proceedings, and increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers; and

3. Adopt an open, merit-based process when selecting national candidates for UN Treaty Body elections.

Thank you.

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Oxford University and PHE confirm high-sensitivity of lateral flow tests

- Findings from independent evaluation of lateral flow tests published
- Findings from PHE Porton Down and Oxford University shows newly deployed lateral flow tests are highly reliable, sensitive and accurate in multiple settings
- Lateral flow tests deployed in Liverpool shown to have over 99.6% specificity

Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England (PHE) and the University of Oxford show lateral flow tests are accurate and sensitive enough to be used in the community, including for asymptomatic people.

Lateral flow tests are rapid turnaround tests that can process COVID-19 samples on site without the need for laboratory equipment, with most generating results in under half an hour.

As part of the government's strategy for testing the effectiveness of this new technology, these new tests are being piloted across England. This includes a 2-week whole-city pilot in Liverpool, which was launched last week.

Prior to commencing these pilots, DHSC commissioned independent research to gain further information on the specificity and sensitivity of the tests in different settings including hospitals, schools, and universities

The swabbing and processing of these tests must currently be conducted at a dedicated testing site by a trained personnel.

The devices are designed to be intuitive and require minimal training to operate, and PHE and the University of Oxford are now looking at how this test could be self-administered.

PHE's world-leading Porton Down lab and University of Oxford undertook this work and have since been putting a number of tests through a 4-phase assessment process. This includes the test being used in Liverpool, and those that are being sent to directors of public health across the country to use for their local communities, and are also being used in schools, universities and workplace settings.

40 different lateral flow devices were put forward, of which 9 met the criteria to continue to full evaluation. Six made it to the third phase, and the Innova SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test, the test being used in the Liverpool pilot, is nearing completion of the 4-stage process.

PHE Porton Down's labs have shown 4 lateral flow tests to have a sensitivity of more than 70% of all PCR-positive cases but importantly catch all those with high viral loads, meaning they are effective in identifying the cases who are infectious and are most likely to transmit the disease. The fast turnaround also allows positive people to isolate quickly also reducing spread.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We are absolutely committed to using the latest testing technology to make asymptomatic testing available in more areas.

It is right we've taken a dual-track approach to evaluating this technology – by piloting them in the field so we can understand how to best to make these tests available, and by getting our world-leading academics and clinicians to undertake rigorous evaluation of their ability to detect the virus.

I'm delighted that both are already demonstrating that lateral flow tests can be the reliable, highly sensitive technology we need to help get this virus under control, and return to as close to normality as possible.

The evaluation published today concludes that the Innova, and other tests which meet PHE and Oxford's standards, should be used in asymptomatic, as they offer the advantage of reducing risk and increasing capacity in addition to Lighthouse and NHS labs.

Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Adviser, NHS Test and Trace, said:

These tests are proving to be accurate and reliable. And, importantly they're able to detect COVID-19 in people without symptoms who could unknowingly be passing the virus onto others.

Our evaluation work and the ongoing pilots are helping us to understand how lateral flow tests work in the field and how we may use them to help stop the spread of the virus.

We are confident that these new tests, which have been rigorously evaluated, will make a real difference in how we protect people from this disease and help break chains of transmission.

The results of the Innova evaluation published today show:

- the specificity of the test was recorded as 99.68% – the overall false positive rate was 0.32%, although this was lowered to 0.06% in a lab setting
- it has an overall sensitivity of 76.8% for all PCR-positive individuals but detects over 95% of individuals with high viral loads, and minimal difference between the ability of the test to pick up viral antigens in symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals

Sensitivity means the proportion of people with a disease that have a positive test, whereas specificity means the proportion of people without the disease that have a negative test.

Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at the University of Oxford, said:

The data in this validation report demonstrates that these inexpensive, easy-to-use tests can play a major role in our fight against COVID-19.

They identify those who are likely to spread the disease and when used systematically in mass testing could reduce transmissions by 90%.

They will be detecting disease in large numbers of people who have never previously even received a test.

Using lateral flow technology to test asymptomatic individuals will help identify those who unknowingly have the virus and enable those who test positive and their contacts to self-isolate, which can help drive down the R rate locally and save lives.

This is crucial to break the chains of transmission of the virus and to support critical industries, key workers and institutions. With lower rates of transmission, those at highest risk from the virus will be more protected and residents will feel more confident in getting back to their day-to-day lives.

Asymptomatic testing is offered in addition to the wider government testing programme offering swab tests for those with symptoms.

The government has also committed to providing the devolved authorities with access to new testing technologies as they are made available, as part of UK-wide collaboration to stop the spread of the virus. Eligibility and deployment of testing in devolved administrations will be determined by the

respective administrations.

See the [full evaluation](#).

The 4-stage process is:

- phase 1 – desktop review to identify tests with potentially high specificity and sufficient sensitivity
- phase 2 – pre-clinical evaluation in lab
- phase 3a – secondary healthcare evaluation
- phase 3b – community research evaluation using volunteer patients and staff
- phase 4 – community pilot field service evaluation in a variety of settings

Immigration Act receives Royal Assent: free movement to end on 31 December 2020

This means free movement will end around seven weeks from now, at 11pm on 31 December 2020.

It delivers on the government's manifesto commitment to restore faith in the immigration system.

For the first time in a generation, the UK will be able to decide who comes into the country, based on the skills they have to offer – not where they are from.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Today marks the delivery of our promise to the British people to regain control of our borders and consider new arrivals on the basis of the skills they have to offer and the contribution they can make, not where they come from.

The passing of this landmark Bill means that for the first time in decades we will have a firm and fair immigration system that will support our economy and see us build back better.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

This time last year the government promised to end free movement,

take back control of our borders and introduce a new points-based immigration system.

Today we have officially delivered on that promise.

The Act of Parliament which ends free movement has completed its journey through Parliament and today achieved Royal Assent.

This is an historic day in our new direction outside of the EU – controlling our own borders and delivering on the people's priorities.

The points-based immigration system will encourage employers to focus on training and investing in the UK work force, driving productivity and improving opportunities for individuals, especially those impacted by coronavirus.

Those wanting to come into the UK to work will need to apply for permission in advance. They will be awarded points for a job offer at the appropriate skill level, if they speak English, and for meeting the appropriate salary threshold. Visas will be awarded to those who gain enough points.

A marketing campaign is underway to make sure businesses are ready for the changes.

The government is also introducing special schemes to enable more scientists, academics, investors, entrepreneurs, and health and care workers to come to the UK easily.

Irish citizens will continue to be able to enter and live in the UK as they do now.

If you're an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen living in the UK before 31 December 2020, you and your family can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021.

Read [further details on the points-based immigration system](#)

The [Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination \(EU Withdrawal\) Act 2020 started its passage through the Houses of Parliament on 5 March 2020](#)