

[PM call with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar: 15 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.



The Prime Minister spoke to Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar this afternoon.

They discussed the UK and Ireland's approaches to tackling coronavirus and agreed on the importance of continued cooperation going forward, given the closeness of our two countries.

On the UK's intention to impose quarantine restrictions on international travellers, the Prime Minister emphasised that there would be exemptions to these measures to respect the Common Travel Area.

The two leaders also spoke about the latest round of UK-EU negotiations. The Prime Minister said the UK will continue to work hard to reach an agreement and continues to believe that this is possible.

The Prime Minister and Taoiseach looked forward to meeting again once the pandemic is over, and to building stronger links between the UK and Ireland.

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[Extra £35m for Wales in fight against coronavirus](#)

Press release

This takes the total amount of funding provided by the UK Government to support the effort to tackle the coronavirus in Wales to over £2.1 billion



The UK Government has committed an extra £35 million to support Wales in the fight against coronavirus, Welsh Secretary Simon Hart has confirmed today (Friday 15 May).

The devolved administration in Wales will receive the additional funding as a result of the UK Government's investment in care homes in England, designed to introduce greater infection control, ramp up testing, step up clinical support, ensure English local authorities have plans in place to support care homes and boost the capacity of the social care workforce.

This takes the total amount of funding provided by the UK Government to support the effort to tackle the coronavirus in Wales to over £2.1 billion.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

This is the latest in a series of direct funding from the UK Government to help Wales through this pandemic, committed in tandem with a package of UK-wide measures on a scale that has never been seen before. We are doing everything we can to ensure Wales overcomes this crisis.

Today's announcement will ensure the Welsh Government can provide vital services while tackling the next stages of this devastating virus.

The UK Government continues to support people in Wales through our UK-wide PPE strategy meaning our heroic front-line workers have the protection they need to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. We have also mobilised the Armed Forces to bolster medical and logistical efforts as well as repatriating British citizens from overseas.

The Chancellor Rishi Sunak has also announced unprecedented UK-wide measures to support businesses and workers in Wales and across the UK during the coronavirus pandemic. These include:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme where small and large employers can apply for a government grant of 80% of workers' salaries up to £2,500 a

month. The scheme will be backdated to March 1 and is available until October this year.

- Deferral of the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June – representing a £30bn injection into the economy.
- £330bn worth of UK Government-backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses.
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme will provide loans of up to £50,000 to benefit small businesses with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders. These loans will be interest free for the first 12 months and businesses can apply online through a short and simple form.
- The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme will help eligible freelance workers in Wales to receive up to £2,500 per month in grants for at least three months.

ENDS

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[The United Kingdom announces two COVID-19 response services for eligible developing countries to help combat the impact of the virus on international trade.](#)

World news story

Aid-for-trade will play a crucial role in responding to the various challenges of COVID-19



Aid-for-trade will play a crucial role in responding to the various

challenges of COVID-19

The UK has updated its aid-for-trade programme portfolio in order to better respond to COVID-19, resulting in 2 new offers that eligible developing countries are encouraged to take advantage of. The first is through the Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund (TAF2+), which is providing support to help eligible developing countries in three areas: to better understand the trade-related impacts of COVID-19 on developing country economies, to notify COVID-related measures to the WTO's monitoring exercise, and to engage on virtual WTO meeting platforms.

Secondly, through funding to the World Bank Trade Facilitation Support Programme (TFSP), the UK is also helping developing countries tackle the COVID crisis through better trade facilitation, helping to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. This is particularly important with regards to the movement of critical goods such as medical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) in developing countries. Support also includes virtual training, workshops and support to National Trade Facilitation Committees.

Ambassador Julian Braithwaite announced at the General Council on Friday 15th May, noting "We are keenly aware that many developing country partners, as well as small island states and other vulnerable economies, are experiencing a serious period of trade shock, as currency depreciations combine with sharp declines in important export sectors like tourism. This potentially jeopardises decades of hard-fought, trade-led prosperity. Today I'd like to announce that, through the UK's Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund and our funding to the World Bank, we are providing support to eligible developing country Members to better understand the trade-related impacts of COVID-19 on their economies, notify COVID-related measures to the WTO's monitoring exercise, and tackle the COVID crisis through better trade facilitation."

Aid-for-trade will play a crucial role in responding to the various challenges of COVID-19 and the UK stands ready to play its part in supporting developing country governments during this unprecedented time in global trade.

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[Government publishes latest R number](#)

R number range for the UK $0.7-1.0$ (Up to date as of 22 May 2020)

The reproduction number (R) is the average number of secondary infections

produced by 1 infected person.

The Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M), a sub-group of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), has built a consensus on the value of R based on expert scientific advice from multiple academic groups. This has been reviewed by SAGE.

The range of 0.7-1.0 is an estimate based on latest data available to determine infection and transmission rates. Data such as contacts, hospital admissions, ICU admissions and deaths generally takes 2 to 3 weeks for changes in R to be reflected in these data sources, due to the time between infection and needing hospital care.

As data on infection is estimated through data on symptomatic cases, hospitalisations, or deaths, there is a delay of around 2 to 3 weeks because as there is a lag between people becoming infected, entering hospital, and dying. Consequently, this range applies to data before the recent adjustments to the restrictions the government has put in place earlier this week.

An R number of 1 means that on average every person who is infected will infect 1 other person, meaning the total number of new infections is stable. If R is 2, on average, each infected person infects 2 more people. If R is 0.5 then on average for each 2 infected people, there will be only 1 new infection. If R is greater than 1 the epidemic is generally seen to be growing, if R is less than 1 the epidemic is shrinking.

SAGE is confident that overall the R is not above 1. This means that the number of infections is not increasing, and is very likely to be decreasing.

R can change over time. For example, it falls when there is a reduction in the number of contacts between people, which reduces transmission.

In the coming weeks and months, the R number will be updated every week on the [GO-Science website](#).

Sir Patrick Vallance, Government Chief Scientific Adviser said:

R is one of the most important things you can track to understand an epidemic. If you can estimate R, then you have part of a reliable tool for planning how to combat the virus.

If the R is higher than 1 that means this disease is growing exponentially and will keep on spreading to more and more people. To keep R below one and control the virus, it is vital that people stay alert and continue to follow the latest government guidelines to the letter.

In the coming weeks we will update this estimate regularly.

R is not the only important measure of the epidemic. R indicates whether the

epidemic is getting bigger or smaller but not how large it is. The number of people currently infected with COVID-19 – and so able to pass it on – is very important. It is estimated by ONS and available on their [website](#). ONS will publish this figure regularly, so as to enable tracking of whether it is going up or down.

R should always be considered alongside the number of people currently infected. If R equals 1 with 100,000 people currently infected, it is a very different situation to R equals 1 with 1,000 people currently infected.

Limitations of R

R is an average value that can vary in different parts of the country, communities, and subsections of the population. It cannot be measured directly so there is always some uncertainty around its exact value.

How is R estimated?

Individual modelling groups use a range of data to estimate R including:

- epidemiological data such as hospital admissions, ICU admissions and deaths – it generally takes 2 to 3 weeks for changes in R to be reflected in these data sources, due to the time between infection and needing hospital care
- contact pattern surveys that gather information on behaviour – these can be quicker (with a lag of around a week) but can be open to bias as they often rely on self-reported behaviour
- household infection surveys where blood samples and swabs are performed on individuals which can provide estimates of how many people are infected – longitudinal surveys (which sample the same people repeatedly) allow a direct estimate of the infection rates

Different modelling groups use different data sources to estimate R using complex mathematical models that simulate the spread of infections. Some may even use all these sources of information to adjust their models to better reflect the real-world situation. There is uncertainty in all these data sources, which is why R estimates can vary between different models, and why we do not rely on one model; evidence is considered, discussed and R is presented as a range.

Who estimates R?

R is estimated by a range of independent modelling groups based in universities and Public Health England (PHE). The modelling groups present their individual R estimates to the Science Pandemic Influenza Modelling group (SPI-M) – a subgroup of SAGE – for discussion. Attendees compare the different estimates of R and SPI-M collectively agrees a range which R is very likely to be within.

UK statement to the WTO Trade Negotiations Committee

Thank you very much Director-General for your summary and to the chairs of the negotiating groups for their updates.

I wanted to start by joining you, New Zealand Ambassador David Walker, and others in paying tribute to Mike Moore. He was the nearest thing we have had to a British Director-General for a long time, and we in the United Kingdom are very proud of him, and of his legacy here in the World Trade Organization.

With the kind permission of the Chair of the General Council, my Secretary of State for International Trade will be here to address the General Council tomorrow, and so I will keep my remarks today brief.

As Members will be aware, the United Kingdom has circulated a document contained in WT/GC/206, which sets out some of the implications of our departure from the European Union. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members, as well as you and your team in the WTO Secretariat, for all of the constructive support we have received in this process.

I would now like to say a few words about the United Kingdom's approach to the ongoing negotiations in which we are all engaged, and our ambitions for 2020 and beyond.

We agree with you, Director-General, that success at MC12 will be measured by the substance of what we agree. And as others have said, starting with the Swiss Ambassador Didier Chambovey, the principal metric of that success will be whether there is a fisheries deal, one that leads to meaningful reductions in harmful subsidies. The Chair, Ambassador Wills, set out the challenges and the way forward, and we agree with him. We need to move to a consolidated text by mid-March. Members need to examine their own long-held positions critically, exercise restraint, and rally around compromises instead of sticking to incompatible national positions. The dire conditions of many of the world's fish stocks dramatically highlights the need to deliver on this Sustainable Development Goal target. We stand ready in the UK, as do our ministers, to help the Chair and you get a deal across the line at Nur Sultan.

More broadly, as upcoming COP26 hosts, we warmly welcome other discussions in this House aimed at facilitating green growth and a more sustainable global economy.

On agriculture, I wanted to thank Ambassador John Deep Ford for his detailed report. The United Kingdom is committed to a fair and market orientated agricultural trading system, and we look forward to working with Members to

address the challenges that we face and progress negotiations. We know how important this issue is for so many Members of this House.

Regarding your second tranche of issues for MC12, the United Kingdom has long supported the Joint Initiatives. They represent perhaps the most significant reform to the WTO in recent years. If they succeed, these initiatives will advance digital trade and trade in services, open up new opportunities for Micro, Small and Medium Size Enterprises, and facilitate global investment for development. But, in addition to that, they will strengthen the negotiating function of the WTO, upon which the health of the global trading system depends.

On wider WTO reform, the United Kingdom supports efforts to strengthen the rules on subsidies, we support efforts to improve compliance around transparency and notifications, and we do need to discuss questions around non-market policies and practices. The WTO cannot afford to ignore these issues.

Finally, allow me to turn to the dispute settlement system. We view a fully-functioning, compulsory, binding and impartial system, with two-tier review as crucial to ensure the rules that we have negotiated can be enforced. We are committed to finding solutions that all Members can support in order to reinstate a fully effective dispute settlement system.

By way of closing, Director-General, let me just reiterate that the United Kingdom stands ready to help, in any way you would find useful, to achieve a meaningful outcome at Nur Sultan that both reconfirms the WTO's central role, and opens up new opportunities and prosperity for our businesses and citizens.