

Support package for legal providers will ensure access to justice during coronavirus outbreak

- Initiatives will support civil, family, and criminal legal aid practitioners to keep the justice system running
- Changes will make hardship payments easier to access
- Some debt repayments to LAA will be paused for legal firms

Introduced by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the move follows wider economic measures for businesses already outlined by the government and will ensure timely support for those needing legally aided services.

New steps were also announced by the department last week in a bid to protect court users, the judiciary and legal professionals by consolidating work into fewer buildings and pausing jury trials.

This will maintain temporary safety measures in courts and tribunals, in line with public health advice, while helping to maintain a core justice system focused on the most essential cases.

As a result of these necessary short-term changes, legal practitioners have faced subsequent delays in cases progressing through the justice system and a reduction in new cases in some areas. This has impacted those that rely on government-funded legal aid and provide essential services in upholding access to justice.

These additional steps will therefore help legal aid practitioners manage their funds in the short term.

The package includes expanding the scope and relaxing the evidence requirements for hardship payments in crown court cases – including reducing the threshold for work done to £1,000, rather than the current £5,000.

We will also align legal aid fees for First Tier Tribunal immigration and asylum appeals with HMCTS' move to an online system for these cases.

LAA has already:

- Introduced measures to increase payments for virtual hearings in appeals before the Mental Health Tribunal, as well as remote advice in police custody to ensure they are in line with in-person hearings
- Halted pursuit of outstanding debts owed to the Legal Aid Agency
- Encouraged legal firms to use existing avenues of financial help, such as the ability to apply for early payment for work already done on a case, benefitting cashflow in the short-term.

Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland, said:

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the legal aid practitioners who have shown immense flexibility and determination throughout this outbreak.

These measures are a clear indication of their important status both in times of crisis and beyond and the role they play in ensuring the justice system continues to function effectively.

I will continue to work with the sector to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are provided with the representation and support they need through our legal aid system.

MOJ and LAA are working closely with practitioners during this time and will keep these measures under review. Future additional measures will be considered alongside the industry to uphold access to justice now and in the future.

Notes to editors

1. The [measures we have announced](#) are available on GOV.UK
2. The [measures to consolidate courts](#) are available on GOV.UK

[Help find new ways to ease global disruption: apply for funding](#)

Businesses and individuals across the world are facing huge challenges in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

The requirement to stay at home and to social distance or self-isolate presents new threats to a wide range of businesses and services, from delivery businesses to food manufacturers, entertainment, financial services, healthcare, hospitality, retail, transport and community support.

Business innovation can play a significant role in developing ways to ease the disruption from COVID-19 and any future global disruption.

Innovate UK is investing up to £20 million in business projects to develop innovative and ambitious ideas to significantly address the needs of society or industry resulting from the coronavirus outbreak.

Business can develop ambitious solutions to society's needs

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

The response of researchers and businesses to the coronavirus outbreak have been remarkable. This new investment will support the development of technologies that can help industries, communities and individuals adapt to new ways of working when situations like this, and other incidents, arise.

Dr Ian Campbell Interim Executive Chair, Innovate UK, said:

The Covid-19 situation is not just a health emergency, but also one that affects the economy and society. With that in mind, Innovate UK has launched this rapid response competition today seeking smart ideas from innovators.

These could be proposals to help the distribution of goods, educate children remotely, keep families digitally connected and even new ideas to stream music and entertainment. The UK needs a great national effort and Innovate UK is helping by unleashing the power of innovation for people and businesses in need.

Help key industries and services disrupted by pandemic

This fast-track competition is open for 10 working days.

Businesses can attract up to £50,000 as an upfront grant payment to cover the full costs of a project lasting up to 6 months.

Projects with strong potential could attract follow-on funding.

Ideas should aim to help key industries and services disrupted by the pandemic and its aftermath. For example, this could include:

- new platforms and software for music artists to stream live performances, connect remotely to their fan-base and allow global audiences to enjoy their live experience
- new ways for families to connect with and remotely monitor their elderly or vulnerable relatives and ensure they are receiving what they need, including food deliveries, doctor appointments and help to pay bills
- technology to help retailers to better respond better to spikes in customer demand, including to ensure they can deliver country-wide
- new education tools that allow teachers to remotely set tasks that keep the whole class together, support vulnerable children and ensure no-one is left behind

Competition information

- the competition opens today Friday 3 April 2020, and the closing date is at midday on Friday 17 April 2020
 - businesses of any size may apply
 - we expect projects to be awarded grants of up to £50,000 and for them to last up to 6 months
 - businesses can attract 100% of their project costs
 - projects must start by June 2020
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[SQPs temporarily allowed to prescribe and authorise supply of veterinary medicines remotely](#)



In light of the enhanced precautions on social distancing we must take as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) has relaxed the enforcement of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMR) to allow SQPs to prescribe and authorise supply of veterinary medicines remotely for the categories of veterinary medicines they are allowed to prescribe and supply under the VMR.

The VMD will not issue an improvement notice if there are breaches of the relevant provisions of the VMR that require SQPs to prescribe and authorise the sale of veterinary medicines in person and from certain premises.

This decision has immediate effect and will last until 31 August and then cease.

All other requirements of the VMR on the Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) as the person responsible for the prescription and supply of certain veterinary medicines continue to apply. The SQP must:

- be the person that has the conversation/consultation with the animal owner

- be the person that makes the prescribing decision
- be satisfied that the person handing over or dispatching the prescribed product is competent to do so

More information is available on the [statement from the VMD](#) (PDF, 170KB, 2 pages).

Published 3 April 2020

Last updated 31 July 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 31 July 2020

Phasing out COVID-19 facilitations

2. 26 June 2020

Date of temporary facilitation changed to 31 July

3. 28 May 2020

Temporary facilitation will last until 30 June when we will review it.

4. 29 April 2020

SQPs temporarily allowed to prescribe and authorise supply of veterinary medicines remotely – Review date now 31 May

5. 3 April 2020

First published.

All VMD inspections postponed due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Forestry Commission operational update: coronavirus

The information on this page was updated on 2 December 2020.

In common with most organisations dealing with the effects of coronavirus, the Forestry Commission is following [government guidance](#) and taking all steps necessary to protect our staff, public safety and help prevent the spread of the virus.

We know that many people rely on our services. We have continued our normal operational work as far as it has been safe to do so – both for us and others. During the [coronavirus restrictions for local areas which starts on the 2 December 2020](#), we will be asking our staff to continue to work from home to serve our customers, but we are also carrying out priority site based work, where this can be done in line with government advice. Some of our offices will remain open in a more limited capacity for essential work that cannot be done at home.

As the situation continues to develop, we will keep our operations and advice under review in line with current government advice. We are working closely with other Defra delivery organisations and have adopted a common set of principles for deploying field staff in light of coronavirus. This reflects a common commitment to sharing expertise and good practice to the benefit of all.

Please be aware that in common with other public service organisations, we expect that increased staff absences caused by coronavirus will inevitably reduce our capacity over the coming weeks and months, despite our best efforts to minimise any disruption. We will use contingency planning to maintain our statutory and customer-facing activities and will publish any updates on changes on GOV.UK.

Offices

Some of our offices will remain open as Covid-secure workplaces which enable a limited number of staff to complete essential work that cannot be done from home.

We are not able to accept visitors to our offices at this time.

Site visits and operations

To support the sector, we are continuing to provide our grant and regulatory services, including site visits where assessed as needed, as well as continuing with critical tree health work. Social distancing guidelines will be followed in all cases and site visits will only go ahead where it is safe to do so. Our approach will be reviewed as government advice is updated.

In the event of any temporary local lockdowns, we will assess our working practices and ensure the appropriate coronavirus local control measures are followed. In this instance we may only respond to significant plant health risks in these local areas if regulated outbreak measures are necessary.

We continue to support the forestry sector by processing [felling licences online](#). In some cases your local Woodland Officer may request a site visit to finalise our decisions on applications. We will contact you if this is the case. Work on investigating alleged illegal felling will continue, so please provide reports of anything suspicious via email to [your local area office](#). For other regulatory and grant related work we will assess all cases and progress remotely where possible, but we may still request a site visit.

Site visits for critical tree health work will continue. This is outlined in more detail below ([Plant Health Forestry](#) section of this page). Private forestry operations can continue where social distancing can be observed. Government guidance on this can be found on GOV.UK, under [guidance for outdoor businesses](#) and [working safely during coronavirus in construction and other outdoor work](#). FISA have also published [guidance for working safely during coronavirus in forestry](#).

Businesses should also look to advice published by trade associations and similar groups on how to apply government guidance to their sector.

Grants

We are continuing to operate Forestry Commission grant and fund services as well as working with our partners to minimise the impact of coronavirus on Countryside Stewardship applications. In some cases, we may need to request further information from you to help progress your application. This may include a site visit.

If you have any problems meeting any application, agreement or claim deadline or requirements please contact Rural Payments as soon as possible:

While the [new national restrictions](#) are in place, please avoid sending post to our offices as we are working at reduced capacity and are unable to check this regularly. As we have limited staff working in our offices, we are still not able to answer the phone. Email is the best way to contact us.

For felling licences, legacy grant agreements or cases of illegal felling, please use the Admin Hub email addresses below. For details on which Admin Hub you need to contact, see our [office contacts](#) on GOV.UK.

Admin Hubs:

For grants and funds, contact:

For issues relating to Countryside Stewardship please contact Rural payments:

To report tree pests and diseases, use the [TreeAlert online reporting tool](#).

For import and export queries (wood and timber products), contact plant.health@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

Plant Health Forestry

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, Defra and the Forestry Commission carried out a review of critical functions earlier in the year, and agreed that port inspections and export work were essential to enable the [import and export trade](#) to continue. Regulated outbreak management of some high-priority work on [tree pests and diseases](#) was also continued.

We have considered the new national restrictions, and it remains our intention to continue with these operations during this period. In all cases our work will be carried out safely with regard to staff, public safety, and social distancing requirements. We will continue to review our approach in line with current government advice.

The nation's forests – managed by Forestry England

Forestry England has continued the essential tasks of caring for our nation's forests and growing and harvesting trees for much-needed timber products during the coronavirus crisis.

The nation's forests remain open to visitors for outdoor recreation and exercise. If you are planning to visit one of our forests, make sure you [plan ahead](#) and follow the latest Government guidance regarding tier levels. Please do not visit if you have coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating.

Forest Research

[Forest Research](#)'s main research stations at Alice Holt in Surrey and the Northern Research Station near Edinburgh are open and Covid-secure. Many staff continue to work from home. There are, however, staff carrying out operationally essential work at research stations and in the field as this cannot be undertaken from home. This includes vital tree health disease research and responding to plant health emergency events to support UK trade, IT support, laboratory based research, facilities management and security.

Other departments' working practices

Below, you can find updates on the working practices of: