

Letter from the Environment Secretary to the food and drink industry

To those working hard to feed the nation,

In the face of what is perhaps the greatest health challenge this country has faced in our lifetime, I want to pay tribute to all those who are working around the clock to keep the nation fed – in our fields, processing plants, factories, wholesalers, stores and takeaways and all of those moving goods around the country and to our homes.

The last three weeks have been stressful and difficult for everyone working to feed the country and provide them with other essential items. Food retailers have faced an unprecedented increase in demand and those working in food production and distribution have had to work harder than ever to ensure that food and drink are kept on the shelves.

The Government has recently taken some unprecedented steps to close cinemas, leisure centres and other public venues and to instruct people to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

However, there are many key workers that are crucial to the resilience of our country. Our NHS staff will be working harder than ever in the weeks ahead. Those of you working to provide the nation with food and other essentials are also delivering an absolutely vital service.

I am in regular dialogue with the food and drink industry and the Government has offered guidance to employers to ensure that when you do your job, you can do so safely. The advice of Public Health England is that there is very little risk of the virus being spread on food or packaging.

Everyone working in the food and drink industry has rallied in an extraordinary way to respond to this unprecedented challenge. Having worked in the food industry myself, I am personally enormously proud and thankful for all the work that you have done in recent weeks, and will be asked to do in the weeks ahead. In many cases you are the hidden heroes, and the country is grateful for all that you have done.

Yours sincerely,

George Eustice

Health and Social Care Secretary responds to NHS workforce statistics

Compared to last year the number of nurses in the NHS has increased by 9,398 and the number of doctors has risen by 5,188, figures published today show.

In addition to this, as part of the 'Your NHS Needs You' recruitment drive, 15,266 former professionals in England have so far come forward to help the NHS tackle COVID-19 and will start being deployed from this weekend. This includes 5,117 doctors, 5,605 nurses and midwives and 3,686 allied health professionals and pharmacists.

From next week 5,750 final year medics and 17,000 final year nursing students in England will also be asked to consider moving into frontline placements, with appropriate support.

This means in total over 38,000 more people will join the NHS in the coming weeks, alongside over 560,000 volunteers who have signed up as part of the new NHS volunteer army helping vulnerable people stay safe and well at home.

Since 2010, there are over 20,200 more doctors in our NHS and almost 23,000 more nurses working on our wards.

Responding to NHS workforce statistics today, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are more indebted than ever to the staff of the NHS. We go into this crisis with the NHS bigger than ever before, with more than 9,000 nurses compared to last year alone. I'm so proud that since our rallying call, 38,000 more people will join or return to the NHS as health and care workers on the frontline fighting COVID-19.

Our NHS is facing an unprecedented challenge and I pay tribute to each and every one of them helping battle this virus.

The entire country is grateful but we must help them too. That's why we are telling everyone to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

New Grenfell adviser appointed as

final Grenfell Taskforce report published

The Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce has published its final report today (26 March) as Nick Hurd takes up role of Independent Adviser.

The Taskforce was set up by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government after the Grenfell Tower fire.

It has worked with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) in developing and putting in place a long-term recovery plan for the bereaved, survivors and wider community.

The report's findings include that RBKC has:

- continued to make progress in delivering a recovery plan for the people of North Kensington
- put bespoke support in place for the bereaved and survivors
- permanently rehoused 95% of households from Grenfell Tower and Walk and produced an ambitious new housing strategy

Despite some remaining challenges which the government is clear need to continue to be addressed, the government is now confident that RBKC can continue to improve without further support from the Taskforce, and the Taskforce will stand down on 31 March.

To make sure the views of those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire continue to be heard across government, former Minister for Grenfell Victims, Nick Hurd, has been appointed as an Independent Adviser to the Prime Minister on Grenfell.

His role will include advising the Prime Minister, other ministers and public bodies with responsibility for Grenfell-related issues, and representing the views of Grenfell communities at the heart of government.

The Grenfell Ministerial Recovery Group will continue to allow the government to oversee the council's progress and meet its ongoing commitment to supporting the Grenfell community.

Secretary of State for Communities, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

I am determined that everyone affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy should continue receiving the support they need and deserve.

I welcome the appointment of Nick Hurd, who will bring a wealth of knowledge from his former role. I know he will be a champion for the community and ensure their view is heard across government.

See the [fifth Taskforce report](#).

The Taskforce has previously [submitted 4 reports](#).

[Chancellor outlines new coronavirus support measures for the self-employed](#)

Good afternoon.

Today I can announce the next step in the economic fight against the Coronavirus pandemic, with new support for the self-employed.

Our step-by-step action plan is aiming to slow the spread of Coronavirus so fewer people need hospital treatment at any one time, protecting the NHS's ability to cope.

At every point, we have followed expert advice to be controlled in our actions – taking the right measures at the right times.

We are taking unprecedented action to increase NHS capacity by increasing the numbers of beds, key staff and life-saving equipment on the front-line to give people the care they need.

That is why it is absolutely critical that people follow our instructions to stay at home, so we can protect our NHS and save lives.

Our action plan to beat the pandemic is the right thing to do – but we know people are worrying about their jobs and their incomes.

Working closely with businesses and trade unions, we have put together a coherent, coordinated and comprehensive economic plan – a plan which is already starting to make a difference:

- big employers like Brewdog, Timpsons and Pret have already said that our Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme means they can furlough thousands of staff, rather than laying them off. And we are publishing this evening detailed guidance on how the scheme will operate so that other businesses can take advantage, too
- small businesses are already benefiting from Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans of up to £5 million, which are interest free for 12 months – with 30,000 enquiries in just four days
- local authorities are already informing more than 700,000 retail,

hospitality and leisure businesses that they will pay no business rates this year

- and the new hardship grants scheme, providing cash grants of up to £25,000 for the smallest businesses, is now up and running

So if any business is struggling, and worrying they may need to lose staff, I would urge you to log on to businesssupport.gov.uk, and look very carefully at what support is available before deciding to lay people off.

I'm proud of what we've done so far, but I know that many self-employed people are deeply anxious about the support available for them.

Musicians and sound engineers; plumbers and electricians; taxi drivers and driving instructors; hairdressers and childminders and many others, through no fault of their own, risk losing their livelihoods.

To you, I say this: You have not been forgotten. We will not let you behind. We are all in this together.

So, to support those who work for themselves, today I am announcing a new Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

The government will pay self-employed people, who have been adversely affected by the Coronavirus, a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to £2,500 a month.

This scheme will be open for at least three months – and I will extend it for longer if necessary.

You'll be able to claim these grants and continue to do business.

And we're covering the same amount of income for a self-employed person as we are for furloughed employees, who also receive a grant worth 80%.

That's unlike almost any other country and makes our scheme one of the most generous in the world.

Providing such unprecedented support for self-employed people has been difficult to do in practice.

And the self-employed are a diverse population, with some people earning significant profits.

So I've taken steps to make this scheme deliverable, and fair:

- to make sure that the scheme provides targeted support for those most in need, it will be open to anyone with income up to £50,000.
- to make sure only the genuinely self-employed benefit, it will be

available to people who make the majority of their income from self-employment

- and to minimise fraud, only those who are already in self-employment, who have a tax return for 2019, will be able to apply

95% of people who are majority self-employed will benefit from this scheme.

HMRC are working on this urgently and expect people to be able to access the scheme no later than the beginning of June.

If you're eligible, HMRC will contact you directly, ask you to fill out a simple online form, then pay the grant straight into your bank account.

And to make sure no one who needs it misses out on support, we have decided to allow anyone who missed the filing deadline in January, four weeks from today to submit their tax return.

But I know many self-employed people are struggling right now, so we've made sure that support is available.

Self-employed people can access the business interruption loans.

Self-assessment income tax payments, that were due in July, can be deferred to the end of January next year.

And we've also changed the welfare system so that self-employed people can now access Universal Credit in full.

A self-employed person with a non-working partner and two children, living in the social rented sector, can receive welfare support of up to £1,800 per month.

The scheme I have announced today is fair.

It is targeted at those who need it the most.

Crucially, it is deliverable.

And it provides an unprecedented level of support for self-employed people.

As we've developed the scheme, I'm grateful for the conversations I've had with the Federation of Small Businesses, the association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed, and a range of trade unions, including the Trades Union Congress.

But I must be honest and point out that in devising this scheme – in response to many calls for support – it is now much harder to justify the inconsistent contributions between people of different employment statuses.

If we all want to benefit equally from state support, we must all pay in equally in future.

These last ten days have shaken our country and economy as never before.

In the last two weeks we have put aside ideology and orthodoxy to mobilise the full power and resources of the British state.

We have done so in pursuit of a single goal: to protect people's health and economic security, by supporting public services like our NHS, backing business, and protecting people's jobs and incomes.

What we have done will, I believe, stand as one of the most significant economic interventions at any point in the history of the British state, and by any government, anywhere in the world. We have:

- pledged that whatever resources the NHS needs, it will get
- promised to pay 80% of the wages of furloughed workers for three months up to £2,500
- deferred more than £30 billion of tax payments until the end of the year
- agreed nearly 17,000 Time to Pay arrangements for businesses and individuals
- made available £330 billion of loans and guarantees
- introduced cash grants of up to £25,000 for small business properties
- covered the cost of statutory sick pay for small businesses for up to two weeks
- lifted the incomes of over four million households with a nearly £7 billion boost to the welfare system
- agreed three-month mortgage holidays with lenders and nearly £1 billion more support for renters through the Local Housing Allowance
- and today we've announced one of the most generous self-employed support schemes in the world

Despite these extraordinary steps, there will be challenging times ahead. We will not be able to protect every single job or save every single business.

But I am confident that the measures we have put in place will support millions of people, businesses and self-employed people to get through this,

get through it together, and emerge on the other side both stronger and more united.

Thank you.

[Leicester illegal waste site blocked by restriction order](#)

The Environment Agency has blocked access to land in Leicester which has been used for the dumping of illegal waste.

This follows a court case at Leicester Magistrates' Court on 26 February 2020 where a restriction order for 6 months was obtained under the Environment Act 1995.

This order prohibits access to, and the importation of waste into, land at Kingstand Golf and Country Club, Beggars Lane, Leicester Forest East, Leicester LE3 3NQ and land adjoining at Kingstand Farm, Hinckley Road, Leicester Forest East, LE3 3LR.

Failure to comply with this order, without reasonable excuse, is a criminal offence. A person found guilty could receive a fine or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

The order has been put in place following complaints from nearby residents last year about waste being dumped and burned.

A spokesperson for the East Midlands Environment Agency said:

We are determined to make life tough for those who damage the environment and blight local communities.

While most waste sites are operated responsibly, this type of illegal dumping causes huge damage along with significant costs to landowners to clear up the mess.

We are working hard to ensure those who flout their responsibilities are penalised and this restriction order helps us to disrupt waste crime.