

COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

Friday 21 August 2020

Heart of London Business Alliance is committed to ensuring our members receive the support they need while the situation in relation to COVID-19 is fast-changing. Our Daily Bulletin provides you with an update on the important announcements and guidance from the Government. In addition, it is recommended that our members monitor the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance regarding COVID-19.

Together with our local Member of Parliament, Nickie Aiken, Heart of London will continue to lobby Government for support for our members and your employees during this difficult time.

Headlines

- The Government has encountered difficulties grading A-level results.
- Portugal has been added to the travel corridor list.
- Public Health England will be scrapped and replaced by the National Institute for Health Protection.

Government encounters difficulties grading students

19th August: This week, the Government faced a number of complications as it attempted to overcome difficulties created by the cancellation of exams due to Covid-19.

Following extensive criticism of the use of an algorithm to determine A-level results, on Monday the Education Secretary [announced](#) that all A Level and GCSE results would be based on teachers' predicted grades. As a result, a large number of A Level grades have been revised upwards. The new grading system has also seen dramatic increases in GCSE grades, with a 40% increase in Level 9s, the top GCSE mark. BTec qualifications also faced disruption, with the exam board Pearson pulling BTec results on the eve of their release, in order to regrade them in line with school-based assessments.

This revision of grades has caused some difficulties for universities who had been working to fill unattained places through the clearing process, and now find themselves oversubscribed. In response, the Government's Higher Education Taskforce has [agreed](#) with the higher education sector to find ways to honour all university offers, and lift the cap on the number of medical students admitted.

The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, has faced considerable pressure throughout the week with some suggesting that he should consider resignation. There are also questions about prior warnings he may have received regarding the algorithm employed by Ofqual, the exams regulator, despite his assertion that he only discovered the scale of concerns "at the weekend" following results.

Portugal now on travel corridor list, as others removed

20th August: The Government has [announced](#) that Portugal has been added to the travel corridor list, following weeks of negotiations as the country's COVID-19 cases fall. From 22nd August arrivals from the country will not need to self-isolate, as long as they haven't been in or transited through any other non-exempt countries in the 14 days preceding their arrival. However, from the same date arrivals from Croatia,

Trinidad and Tobago and Austria will be required to quarantine for 14 days. This follows an uptick in weekly COVID-19 case figures in all locations, including a 164% increase in Croatia and 232% in Trinidad and Tobago.

National Institute for Health Protection to replace Public Health England

18th August: The Health Secretary Matt Hancock [announced](#) that the Government is to overhaul responsibility for healthcare in England by scrapping Public Health England (PHE). PHE will be replaced by a new National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) which will be responsible for protecting the UK from pandemics and infectious diseases. The new Institute will merge Public Health England (PHE), the NHS COVID-19 Test and Trace programme and the Joint Biosecurity Centre, and will be led by Baroness Dido Harding, currently head of NHS Test and Trace. The NIHP's formal operating structure will be finalised in Spring 2021.

This comes as a result of dissatisfaction over the performance of PHE, which was created in 2013 by a merger of 129 public health organisations. However, there has been criticism of the Government's decision, with health bodies such as the King's Fund warning Ministers that the abolition of PHE will distract staff from focusing on tackling the second wave of Covid-19.

Registration for COVID-19 vaccine trials encouraged

17th August: In an effort to encourage more volunteers to join the NHS COVID-19 Vaccine Research Registry, the Government has [announced](#) that over 100,000 people have already signed up to the programme. Researchers are particularly interested in volunteers from the over 65s category, frontline health and social care workers, and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, groups which have been disproportionately affected by the virus. The call comes as the worldwide search for a vaccination continues, with UK trials ongoing in institutions such as the University of Oxford and Imperial College London.

Devolved Nations

- **21st August:** Northern Ireland announced a tightening of its lockdown measures following a rise in cases. The number of people permitted to meet together outdoors will be limited to 15, with only six from two households allowed to meet indoors.
- **19th August:** The Scottish First Minister [announced](#) a £1 million support fund for Aberdeen businesses affected by the temporary lockdown measures, ahead of the reopening of non-licensed premises in the city scheduled for next week.
- **18th August:** The Northern Irish Health Minister announced that the country's flu vaccination programme is being expanded, given concerns that the seasonal flu will add additional pressure to the health system as it deals with additional COVID-19 cases in the latter part of the year.
- **17th August:** The Welsh Government confirmed the lifting of restrictions on the use of public transport only for essential travel, although wearing a face covering is still required.

Other news

- **18th August:** According to Treasury [figures](#), the Government's Eat Out to Help Out scheme was used more than 35 million times in its first two weeks of operation.
- **17th August:** The Government [announced](#) the opening of the second stage of the Self Employment Income Support Scheme, with those eligible able to receive a grant from the Government worth up to £6,570.

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