

News and Updates Updated 25 March 2020

Northern Ireland acts to support suppliers and businesses impacted by Coronavirus (25 March 2020)

Northern Ireland's Finance Minister, Connor Murphy, has outlined steps taken to ensure Government departments pay their suppliers as quickly as possible to maintain cash flow and protect jobs.

He has instructed all Government departments to continue paying suppliers who provide goods and services for which demand has reduced or been paused temporarily due to Covid-19. This will help cash flow through the supply chain and pay salaries and protect jobs. It will help suppliers who are struggling now to resume normal delivery when the outbreak is over.

OFTEC temporarily extend qualifications that expire during Coronavirus restrictions (25 March 2020)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, OFTEC is temporarily extending qualifications that will expire. They will automatically extend any technician's qualifications which expire before 31st May for a period of 3 months, subject to review of government advice.

The OFTEC Scheme Committee hope that this temporary allowance of the scheme in recognition of the challenging times ahead is of some relief to registered technicians who may be called upon to support the general public and those who most need heating and hot water during the height of this pandemic.

For more information: <https://www.oftec.org/technicians/extending-qualifications-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Support for Businesses in Scotland and Northern Ireland (25 March 2020)

The UK Government has published a [Scotland specific page](#) and a [Northern Ireland specific page](#) on their website with guidance for people in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Support for Apprentices (25 March 2020)

Skills Development Scotland have published [FAQs](#) for apprentices worried about the impact that the unprecedented disruption of COVID-19 is causing.

For more help please contact your Regional Training Officer or SNIPEF Training on 0131 524 1245 or training@snipef.org.

Commercial insurance (24 March 2020)

Most commercial insurance policies are unlikely to cover pandemics or unspecified notifiable diseases, such as COVID-19. However, those businesses which have an insurance policy that covers government ordered closure and pandemics or government ordered closure and unspecified notifiable disease should be able to make a claim (subject to the terms and conditions of their policy).

Insurance policies differ significantly, so businesses are encouraged to check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers.

For more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-employees>

Virtual and Local Business Support from Business Gateway (24 March 2020)

Business Gateway is being responsive and reactive to the needs and challenges Scottish Businesses face due to COVID-19. They have free services that may be useful to you, both online and locally. This includes helpful webinars and online tutorials.

For more information: <https://www.bgateway.com/resources/coronavirus-support>

Effective 'lockdown' to be introduced (24 March 2020)

The First Minister has called for an immediate stop to public gatherings of more than two people in Scotland in a bid to flatten the curve of Covid-19 spread and protect the NHS. Following a meeting of the UK Government's COBR committee, an effective ban is in place on gatherings in public places, excluding household groups or in a work-related capacity.

In addition – as the First Minister set out earlier – all non-essential shops should be closed, as well as public spaces such as libraries, communal parks and playgrounds, and places of worship. The ban extends to ceremonial social events, such as weddings and christenings, with the exception of funerals which will be restricted to immediate family only.

From 23 March 2020 the only permissible reasons to leave your home are as follows:

- to shop for basic necessities and that should be limited to once a day
- to take exercise once a day - but alone or with your own household, not in groups
- for medical reasons or to care for a vulnerable person
- to travel to essential work if that cannot be done at home. Further guidance to employers is pending.

For more information: <https://www.gov.scot/news/effective-lockdown-to-be-introduced/>

Guidance for UK businesses trading internationally (24 March 2020)

UK businesses that export or deliver goods and services abroad and have been impacted by the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19 can access support through the Department for International Trade. DIT can support businesses by:

- providing assistance with customs authorities to ensure smooth clearance of their products
- offering advice on intellectual property and other issues with business continuity

You can call the business support helpline on 0300 456 3565 and visit the [dedicated business support website](#) for more information. This team will discuss the challenges faced by UK businesses at home and overseas to understand how best the department can support them.

More information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses-trading-internationally>

Further businesses and premises to close (24 March 2020)

On 23 March the Government, stepped up measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus and save lives. All non-essential premises must now close. Takeaway and delivery services may remain open and operational in line with guidance on Friday 20 March. Online retail is still open and encouraged and postal and delivery service will run as normal. Retail and public premises which we expect to remain open must:

- Ensure a distance of two meters between customers and shop assistants; and
- Let people enter the shop only in small groups, to ensure that spaces are not crowded.
- Queue control is required outside of shops and other essential premises that remain open.

Parks will remain open but only for individuals and households to exercise once a day. Communal spaces within parks such as playgrounds and football pitches will be closed.

For a full list of business closures and more information:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close?utm_source=77e9a975-dcba-4146-b1f9-d36e8d01465f&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Commercial Tenant Rent (24 March 2020) FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of coronavirus will be protected from eviction; the government has announced.

Many landlords and tenants are already having conversations and reaching voluntary arrangements about rental payments due shortly, but the government recognises businesses struggling with their cashflow due to coronavirus remain worried about eviction.

These measures, included in the emergency Coronavirus Bill currently going through Parliament, will mean no business will be forced out of their premises if they miss a payment in the next 3 months.

The latest measure builds on the package of support for businesses already announced.

For more information: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-protection-for-businesses-with-ban-on-evictions-for-commercial-tenants-who-miss-rent-payments?utm_source=e34139d1-5c25-473c-98c4-4e67b356f642&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Online Isolation Note (23 March 2020)

People unable to work for more than seven days because of coronavirus (COVID-19) can obtain an isolation note through a new online service.

Isolation notes will provide employees with evidence for their employers that they have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus, either because they have symptoms or they live with someone who has symptoms, and so cannot work.

As isolation notes can be obtained without contacting a doctor, this will reduce the pressure on GP surgeries and prevent people needing to leave their homes.

For the first seven days off work, employees can self-certify so they don't need any evidence for their employer. After that, employers may ask for evidence of sickness absence. Where this is related to having symptoms of coronavirus or living with someone who has symptoms, the isolation note can be used to provide evidence of the advice to self-isolate.

The notes can be accessed through the [NHS website](#) and [NHS 111 online](#). After answering a few questions, an isolation note will be emailed to the user. If they don't have an email address, they can have the note sent to a trusted family member or friend, or directly to their employer. The service can also be used to generate an isolation note on behalf of someone else.

What to do if someone develops symptoms on site? (23 March 2020)

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#).

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to [NHS 111](#) or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the [government response page](#) for the latest details.

New Scottish Forum (22 March 2020)

A new forum of construction bodies comprising SNIPEF, SELECT, CECA Scotland, SBF, FMB, LEIA, BESA, NRFC, the Scaffolding Association and the Stone Federation has been established. It is hoped that by joining together we can work with the Scottish Government identifying measures which would help our industries during COVID-19.

The Construction Industry Coronavirus (CICV) Forum, as it is known has already [issued a letter](#) to Fiona Hyslop, Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, urging her to support the Scottish construction sector.

SNIPEF Members are encouraged to lobby their own MSP's asking for their support using the following [letter](#). You can find your MSP by clicking [here](#).

Gas Safe Register (21 March 2020)

Gas Safe Register has been reviewing the ongoing COVID-19 situation with HSE, and has published updated guidance on their website.

<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/help-and-advice/covid-19-advice-and-guidance/>

Social distancing (21 March 2020)

The government has urged the public to take further steps to protect themselves and the wider population from the coronavirus, including:

- Everyone to stay at home unless they need to get essential supplies such as food and medicines.
- All those able to work from home to do so, unless their work is essential.
- Only traveling if absolutely necessary - while public transport won't stop, this should only be used for essential travel – for example by key workers to travel to and from work.

The measures will be reviewed on a monthly basis, and are being implemented across the whole of the UK in agreement with the devolved administrations. If needed, the government will enforce these measures by law.

This will not affect supermarkets or retailers that supply fuel, medicines and other vital goods, which will continue to be open as normal for the public

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-further-measures-on-social-distancing?utm_source=2cae8217-c514-4e1a-8555-9af53317e776&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Supply chains affected by COVID-19 (21 March)

If your supply chain has been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19), the Department for International Trade (DIT) can help you to find alternative suppliers. The department has relationships with a global network of businesses across the world and will be able to advise you on the options available.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses-trading-internationally>

Job Retention Scheme (20 March 2020)

All UK employers will be able to access support to continue paying part of their employees' salary for those employees that would otherwise have been laid off during this crisis.

HMRC will reimburse 80% of "furloughed" workers wage costs, up to a cap of £2,500 per month.

Employers are required to designate affected employees as "furloughed" workers, notify employees of this and submit earnings information to HMRC on a new online portal which is being set up.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

Deferred VAT and Income Tax Payments (20 March)

VAT payments are being deferred for 3 months and if you are self-employed, Income Tax payments due in July 2020 will be deferred to January 2021.

VAT refunds and reclaims will be paid by the government as normal.

This is an automatic offer with no applications required.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

Closure of schools, childcare and other educational settings (20 March 2020)

The Government is asking schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children where they can.

If workers think they fall within the critical categories above, they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

Critical workers (20 March 2020)

The Scottish Government has produced “Guidance on critical childcare and learning provision for key workers” which identifies key workers falling into 3 categories as follows:

- **Category 1** – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff.
- **Category 2** – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (e.g Fire, Police, Prisons, Social Workers, etc), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
- **Category 3** – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus---school-and-elc-closures-guidance-on-critical-childcare-provision-for-key-workers/>

MOTs for cars, motorcycles and light vans (20 March 2020)

DVSA has suspended MOTs (annual tests) for all heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and public service vehicles (PSVs) for up to 3 months from 21 March 2020.

The Department for Transport continues to keep MOT testing under review and will provide an update in due course.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/driving-tests-and-mots-for-heavy-vehicles-suspended-for-up-to-3-months-to-help-tackle-spread-of-coronavirus?utm_source=03acbaa7-a0da-4716-aeab-e574412e03fd&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Critical workers (19 March 2020)

A full [list of critical workers and further information](#) has been published by the UK Government. In this the Government states that this includes staff needed for the oil, gas, electricity and water sector including sewerage (Utilities).

A secondary source has received confirmation from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) that while the definition of critical workers does not include any type of firm within the construction supply chain, it would include tradespeople undertaking emergency repairs.

SNIPEF has written to the BEIS, the Scottish Government and NI Assembly for clarification that our members would be classified as critical workers and the scope of work this extends to.