



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

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INT2020/06299/DC  
20 May 2020

Dear Julian,

Thank you for the invitation to give evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on 22 April. During the session, I committed to write to yourself and other Committee members on a number of matters.

### **Funding Criteria for Charities**

I committed to write to you regarding the criteria to identify those charities eligible to apply for the £750 million funding package.

There are two main parts to this package - £360 million to be distributed as direct grants from Government departments and £370 million to be distributed via the National Lottery Community Fund.

Funding via departments is designed to address immediate needs that cannot be met through access to existing economic support measures, such as the furlough scheme, and support organisations which either:

- Provide key services specific to supporting the Covid-19 response, to reduce burden on the NHS or other public services; or
- Provide critical frontline services to vulnerable groups affected by Covid-19 and associated measures.

It has been allocated to Government departments in accordance with urgent priorities in their relevant sectors, including around £200 million for the Department of Health and Social Care for hospices, £76 million to support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery; and £16 million for food charities to provide meals for those in need.

DCMS is also working closely with the National Lottery Community Fund on its funding criteria. Applicants will be assessed on the extent to which they meet the objectives of the fund, which are to reduce temporary closures of essential charities and to increase community support to vulnerable people affected by the Covid-19 crisis.



Grants distributed from the National Lottery Community Fund will support organisations which are experiencing short term income disruption and/or increased demand for their services as a result of Covid-19. Grants will meet essential costs of sustaining current services, and/or refocusing services to address more urgent needs for people and communities. Further detail on the process for applying for funding from the National Lottery Community Fund will be published shortly.

## **5G Misinformation**

Damian Green asked me about the vandalism of 5G phone masts and misinformation about 5G.

I condemn the abhorrent incidents of vandalism and fire damage to telecoms infrastructure sites across the UK, as well as the abuse and harassment of telecommunications field engineers. These appalling acts, at a time when our NHS and emergency responders are relying on mobile phone masts more than ever, appear to have been spurred by conspiracy theories, posted and shared on social media, linking new 5G mobile services to coronavirus.

Given that the attacks appear to be carried out in response to online conspiracy theories rather than a concerted political or ideological movement, the attacks are currently being treated as criminal incidents rather than as a threat to the UK's critical national infrastructure or as terrorist activity.

That said, with 5G graffiti left on some infrastructure and online 'anti-5G' weblinks and social media postings, the National Crime Agency is continually assessing for links to organised crime.

Conspiracy theories surrounding the deployment of 5G were circulating online as early as mid-2018. Some online commentators started inaccurately making a connection between Covid-19 and 5G in early January, for example suggesting that Wuhan was one of the first places that 5G was deployed in China, and this had affected residents' immune systems.<sup>1</sup> This developed into other, overlapping narratives linking Covid-19 and 5G.

In early April, some celebrities and mainstream commentators began discussing these theories online. While most media reporting called out the conspiracy, this may also have contributed to increased public awareness of the conspiracy theories.

In response, the Government has issued firm rebuttals on social media and at press briefings, and supports the strong statement from the mobile network operators on the importance of protecting our critical infrastructure. The counter-disinformation unit continues to monitor and work closely with social media platforms to help them identify and take action to remove dangerous, incorrect claims that link 5G to the virus or incite real world harm, in line with their terms and conditions.

As you know, in early April I held a roundtable with Facebook, Google and Twitter to discuss responses to 5G misinformation, and longer term ways of working to ensure that the British public has access to accurate and trusted information about Covid-19. All three platforms have updated terms of service and made technical changes to their products to limit the spread of misinformation and disinformation. For example, YouTube updated its policies to prohibit videos that link 5G technology to the spread of Covid-19. WhatsApp reduced the number of chats a highly forwarded message could be forwarded to at once, from five to one, which WhatsApp reports has cut the spread of viral messages by 70%.

I will continue to put pressure on social media companies to respond quickly and robustly to the threat posed by false information about Covid-19.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fullfact.org/online/wuhan-5g-coronavirus/>

## The Creative Industries and Covid-19 support schemes

I agreed to respond to Kevin Brennan's queries about the Government's figures on how many individuals in the creative industries sector are not covered under the Government's support schemes.

DCMS has been working to measure the level of creative industries eligibility for government Covid-19 support schemes. The official data does not allow a full analysis and therefore there has been emphasis on surveys to understand eligibility and access. DCMS is running its own survey with results available shortly. We have also worked with other organisations to gather information, some of the findings are set out below.

A survey of 2,021 organisations and freelancers by the Creative Industries Federation found that:

- 53% of self-employed people in the Creative Industries believe they are eligible for self-assessment deferral. 34% believe they are eligible for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.
- 42% of Creative Industries businesses believe they are eligible for the Job Retention Scheme (39% believe they are not eligible).
- 64% of Creative Industries businesses believe they are eligible for VAT/Income tax referral. 62% do not believe they are eligible for business rates exemption.

Analysis of the ONS annual population survey (APS) 2018 found that:

- There are at least **57,000** workers employed in the Creative Industries for a year or less. Those employed for less than a year may be less likely to be covered by HMG schemes.
- The data also shows that people working in Creative Industries in 2018 were more likely to be self-employed than the UK average (**31% vs 15%**).

DCMS is continuing to provide feedback to HMT on all schemes on behalf of our sectors, including for our vital creative industries. At the same time, I appreciate that HMT has difficult decisions to make and will have to draw a line somewhere on each of its schemes and acknowledge that some of these decisions have been taken to ensure schemes can be operated quickly and as simply as possible and at the same time protect the taxpayer from fraudulent claims.

## Digital Inclusion

I agreed to write to Julie Elliott on the specifics of all Government funding providing support to individuals without access to the internet or internet capable devices.

The Government has worked with the UK's major telecommunications providers to agree measures to support connectivity for vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19. These measures include removing all data allowance caps on all current fixed broadband services. Providers will ensure that vulnerable customers or those self-isolating receive alternative methods of communication wherever possible if priority repairs to fixed broadband and landlines cannot be carried out.

DCMS is working with Futuredotnow, a coalition of companies and civil society working to improve digital skills, on the campaign DevicesDotNow, which asks industry to release at least 100,000 connected devices to those who need them most and can be supported to use them.

The campaign will work with the government to ensure that devices go where they are most needed to support better health and social care outcomes for the digitally excluded, to support remote working and to promote wider wellbeing. The industry-led campaign is asking for donations of tablets, laptops, smart phones and wifi dongles to give to low income households that are shielding or vulnerable and don't have internet access.

The Government also recently announced that vulnerable and disadvantaged children across England are to receive laptops and tablets to make remote education accessible. Devices have been ordered for children in the most vital stages of their education, those who receive support from a social worker and care leavers. The government will also provide 4G routers to make sure disadvantaged secondary school pupils and care leavers can access the internet – where those families do not already have mobile or broadband internet in the household. My department is also working with the major telecommunications providers to make it easier for families to access selected educational resources by temporarily exempting these sites from data charges.

### **Engagement with the Creative Industries Sector**

I committed to write to Steve Brine on the specifics of the Department's engagement with the creative industries sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

My ministerial colleagues and I are having regular conversations with the representative bodies for the creative industries sectors and I know my officials are in daily contact with the sectors. My colleague, the Minister for Digital and Culture, is holding weekly roundtable meetings with a number of organisations representing the creative industries. Those invited to date include representatives from:

- Overarching bodies - the Creative Industries Council, the Creative Industries Federation
- Fashion - British Fashion Council
- Film/Screen - BFI, PACT, Netflix, British Film Commission, UKCinema Association, Film Distributors Association, UK Screen Alliance
- Music, production and events - UKMusic, Musicians Union, Music Venues Trust, BPI, Production Services Association, Concert Promoters Association, Association of Independent Festivals, Association of Independent Music, Music Publishers' Association
- Video Games - UKie, Games London/London Games Festival, Tiga
- Architecture - RIBA
- Advertising - Advertising Association
- Publishing - Professional Publishers' Association, Publishers' Association
- Other - Night Time Industries Association

### **Rugby League package**

I also wanted to update you on the additional support that Government has made available since I gave my evidence. The Rugby Football League will receive a £16 million loan to safeguard the future of the sport in England. This will help the sport deal with the extreme financial impact of the coronavirus outbreak while the season remains suspended, due to social distancing measures.

I am sure you will appreciate that, given the scale of the government interventions to date, the bar for making direct interventions to support specific sports is exceptionally high. However, rugby league is unique in a number of respects: firstly, in bringing enormous social and economic value to local communities in areas where other sports cannot reach; secondly, in facing an existential threat to the whole sport with knock-on consequences for investment in facilities; and thirdly, because in the absence of support our ability to be a credible host of the Rugby League World Cup in 2021 would have been severely undermined.

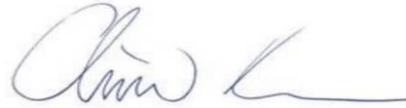
This Government was elected on a manifesto commitment to support this tournament: the collapse of the professional game in this country would have incurred significant reputational damage and affected our manifesto commitment.

**Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport**

All Rugby Football League Super League, Championship and League 1 clubs based in England are eligible to apply for funding. Further details on when the fund will open will be announced in due course.

I hope that this answers the questions of yourself and other Committee members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Dowden', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP**  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport