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THE PRIME MINISTER

1 February 2021

*Dear Bernard,*

During my appearance before the Liaison Committee on 13 January I said that I would write following up on issues raised by you and Caroline Nokes. Catherine McKinnell and Hilary Benn have subsequently written to me about their questions.

*1. Military assistance to the vaccine programme and process for a Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (Question 12)*

As part of the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of service personnel have been deployed across the UK and I would like to thank them for their service.

The Ministry of Defence continues to work closely with NHS England and the Devolved Administrations to provide Armed Forces to the Vaccine Programme. It has, for example, established 41 Defence Vaccination teams that have been, or can be, deployed at short notice into either a COVID-19 Vaccination Centre or Regional Primary Care Network. It has also deployed military planners to assist the Vaccine Task Force.

You asked about the Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) process. Over 500 MACA requests so far have been received by the Ministry of Defence to help with our domestic COVID-19 response. The Defence Secretary has put in place unprecedented levels of delegated decision-making to maximise the responsiveness of the MACA process and ensure it is able to respond in a timely manner. Military liaison officers have also been deployed at both regional and national level to assist NHS England and other Government Departments to identify and process requests for military support. And NHS England has established a MACA Panel to scrutinise and triage MACAs where required. NHS England will write to you separately about the issue you raised of a specific MACA request in Essex.

## *2. Vaccine transmission data (Question 24)*

This country is engaged in the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in our history. I pay tribute to everyone who has contributed to this remarkable achievement - from development, medical trials, procurement, manufacture, roll-out of the vaccination programme and members of the public coming forward to have their jabs. Together we will defeat the virus.

While at this stage we do not know what impact the COVID-19 vaccine will have on transmission, as large numbers of people from at risk groups are given an effective vaccine, we will be able to gather the evidence to prove the impact on infection rates, hospitalisation and reduced deaths. And as larger numbers do get vaccinated, we will hopefully move further along the path back to a more normal way of life.

## *3. Support for the hospitality industry (Question 32)*

Catherine McKinnell wrote to me about a Petitions Committee debate about Government support for the hospitality industry and the need for a dedicated Minister for Hospitality.

The hospitality sector plays an important role in driving local economies, providing jobs, and supporting communities across the country. That is why we have put in place one of the world's most comprehensive economic responses to the pandemic – backed by over £280 billion – to protect jobs, businesses, and public services throughout and beyond this pandemic. We have protected thousands of businesses with over £100 billion of support. This includes over £68 billion in loans, £27.5 billion in VAT deferrals and £11 billion in business grants.

Responsibility for the hospitality sector overall is split between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS). BEIS is responsible for food and beverage hospitality, such as cafes, pubs and restaurants, weddings and nightclubs, with DCMS responsible for hospitality accommodation. The split in responsibilities reflects the fact that the majority of hospitality businesses are SMEs, and BEIS has a great deal of experience in supporting businesses, while hospitality accommodation is more closely aligned with DCMS's responsibility for tourism.

Both Departments work extremely closely together to ensure the interests of the hospitality sector overall is fully represented within Government, and both departments are fully committed to supporting the hospitality sector. Ministers from both departments host regular meetings with the sector and answer questions in Parliament on a range of subjects related to the hospitality sector.

The Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets, Paul Scully, would be happy to meet Claire Bosi and the other petitioners to discuss this further.

#### *4. Provision of British Sign Language (Question 45)*

I know how challenging the pandemic has been for those living with disabilities. That is why we have taken a variety of steps to ensure that public health information and Government COVID-19 communications are accessible to all.

We have provided COVID-19 guidance in alternative formats including Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL) and Audio. For those reliant on BSL many of our most crucial content assets can be accessed in a range of formats including easy read, large text formats and videos with BSL interpretation, such as Stay Alert and NHS Test and Trace COVID-19 content. These can be found on Public Health England's campaign resource centre for health bodies, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to share and use.

We have worked with the BBC to establish BSL interpretation at all No10 press conferences via the BBC News Channel and iPlayer, available via its News channel, YouTube channel and iPlayer, as well as on our social media channels. This is available free to air.

We continually review and seek to improve the accessibility of COVID-19 communications. The Government Digital Service has published detailed accessibility standards and guidelines to help departmental channel owners improve content, and bespoke teams regularly check GOV.UK accessibility practices. The Cabinet Office COVID-19 Communication Hub has worked closely with the Government Equalities Office and held regular feedback sessions with disability charities to ensure all COVID-19 communications are accessible to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations.

*5. EU visas for musicians (Question 68)*

This Government recognises the importance of the UK's thriving cultural industries. That has been demonstrated by providing an unprecedented £1.57 billion package of support to help them through the COVID-19 pandemic. And it is why we pushed for ambitious arrangements for performers and artists to be able to work across Europe after the end of freedom of movement.

Our proposals informed by extensive consultation and engagement with the UK's cultural and creative industries, would have allowed musicians to travel and perform in the UK and the EU more easily, without needing work permits.

The EU's offer in the negotiations would not have worked for touring musicians: it did not deal with work permits at all and would not have allowed support staff to tour with artists. Moreover, the EU's proposals were also part of a package on visa-free travel that was not consistent with the Government's manifesto commitment to take back control of our borders.

We recognise that the outcome means that some additional requirements will need to be met for the sector. It is absolutely vital that we now support our touring sectors to understand the new rules associated with working and travelling in the EU. That is why we are delivering an extensive programme of engagement with the sector to help them understand any new requirements. That includes working with Arts Council England and various other sector bodies.

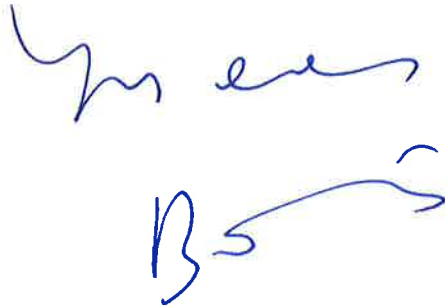
As the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has already made very clear, we will also look at whether we can work with our partners in EU member states to find ways to make life easier for those working in the creative industries in our respective countries.

*6. Ministerial responsibility for freeports (Question 99)*

The establishment of Freeports is an important priority for the Government and I am grateful to the International Trade Committee in carrying out its important inquiry into this. Further to the commitment that I made during my appearance, Ministers from both the Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have accepted invitations to give evidence to the Committee.

*7. Further appearances*

I know your office has been in contact with mine about a date for my next appearance before the Committee. I have asked that the Committee is offered a date once my forthcoming diary commitments are clearer.



Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bernard" and "Jenkin".

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP