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Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
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Jonathan Djanogly MP
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By email to:
jonathan.djanogly.mp@parliament.uk

3 May 2020

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for your email of 19 March to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma MP, regarding the designation of essential businesses as we face the COVID-19 outbreak. I am responding as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office. I apologise for the delay in getting back to you.

The guidance published by the Department for Education relates to the Government's advice to schools that they should continue to offer provision to the children of critical workers, following school closures to help tackle COVID-19. It includes a range of sectors which are considered critical, although many parents working in such sectors will still be able to look after their children at home. In the first instance, employees should confirm with their employer if their role is critical and if they are able to work from home, to establish whether they meet the criteria for their children to attend school. We are asking individuals, employers and schools to make sensible judgments about the policy.

The indicative list published on GOV.UK (below) applies to the provision of childcare, and does not confer special status on individuals included in the guidance pertaining to travel, business or any other services. However, the Department of Health and Social Care has published details of essential workers in terms of provision of testing.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

The Government's position remains that everyone who can work from home should do so. Where that is not possible, people should go into work where it is safe and they are not symptomatic, following relevant Public Health England guidance, including, where possible, maintaining a 2 metre distance from others, and washing their hands with soap and water often, for at least 20 seconds (or using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available).

The Government has placed restrictions on the operations of certain businesses as part of the strategy of enhanced social distancing. Separate guidance has been published on this and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>

With the exception of the non-essential shops and public spaces, the Government has not required any other businesses to close – indeed it is important for business to carry on.

As I am sure both you and Dr Moloney are now aware, the Government is also stopping all public gatherings of more than two people. There are only two exceptions to this rule:

- where the gathering is of a group of people who live together; and
- where the gathering is essential for work purposes - but workers should be trying to minimise all meetings and other gatherings in the workplace.

I hope this reply is helpful in clarifying the current position for Dr Moloney. The Government continues to do all it can to support the provision of public services and the UK economy during the COVID-19 response.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Gove', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
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