

Guidance on Government funding for zoos and aquariums impacted by COVID-19

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1. Background

This guidance provides information on financial support to zoos and aquariums in the United Kingdom, who have been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and sets out the actions that zoos and aquariums can take to cope with the impacts of COVID-19.

The Government recognise that this sector faces unique circumstances and are committed to working with the industry to understand the impacts. We have been engaging closely with the main industry association, the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), and with individual zoos about the best way forward, also taking expert advice from Defra's Zoos Expert Committee.

The wide range of licensed zoos, from small and large mixed collections to safari parks, bird of prey centres, reptile houses and aquariums, are facing unprecedented challenges resulting from sudden loss of visitors and significant loss of income, along with staff and volunteer shortages. Of course, this industry must also continue to meet their statutory and moral obligations in respect of animal welfare.

2. Financial support for zoos and aquariums

The Government has announced unprecedented support for public services, workers and businesses to protect against the current economic emergency. The Government is also committed to protecting animal welfare and recognises that zoos and aquariums already in financial distress will already be working hard to access the government financial support schemes. For this reason, a Zoos Support Fund will be established for licensed zoos and aquariums. Similar support will be provided by the Devolved Administrations.

If your zoo or aquarium is in severe financial distress and you have fully explored and exhausted all other reasonable avenues to generate income and reduce costs, including the existing COVID-19 business support schemes, then please contact us as quickly as possible.

The Government believe this Fund will allow us to work with you on a case by case basis to explore options for short-term emergency funding. This financial assistance is intended to enable zoos and aquariums to care for their animals during this crisis and/or support their rehoming in another appropriate setting. We are developing the

details of the scheme and will be in touch with further information shortly. In the meantime, please work through the steps set out below, as exhausting these possibilities will be a pre-requisite for any application to the scheme.

3. Steps you can take

- ✓ Proactively communicate with current and past donors, and make use of social media, websites, online crowd funding, press and other forums, to increase donations
- ✓ Explore whether additional support is available through your commercial bank and landlord (e.g. mortgage/rent holidays beyond the three-month evictions ban, additional overdraft facilities, commercial loans, etc.)
- ✓ Explore whether additional support is available within the sector, possibly by collaboration with other zoos
- ✓ Make use of the HMG Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Business Interruption Loans, business rates reliefs, and VAT postponements (further information provided in the section below)
- ✓ Attempt to re-negotiate prices and seek to defer payments with key suppliers
- ✓ Put in place any and all cost-saving measures to temporarily reduce your overheads as far as possible, without putting at risk staff safety, or the statutory and moral obligations to protecting your living collection
- ✓ Make use of your insurance* - check the terms and conditions of your insurance policy and speak to your broker if in doubt
- ✓ Consider furloughing staff as far as possible

**If the only barrier to your business making an insurance claim was a lack of clarity from the government on whether zoos are forced to close, you should refer to the guidance produced by HM Treasury at the following link:*

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873676/Covid-19_fact_sheet_18_March.pdf

The guidance states that “the government’s medical advice of 16 March is sufficient to enable those businesses which have an insurance policy that covers both pandemics and government ordered closure to make a claim - provided all other terms and conditions in their policy are met. Businesses should check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers if in doubt.”

If you do contact us, please provide as much information as possible about your situation, including how you have addressed each of the points above.

This guidance has been produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on behalf of the Devolved Administrations of Scotland and Northern Ireland for zoo operators and zoo licence holders.

This guidance will be updated on a regular basis as new information becomes available.

4. Questionnaire

We would also be grateful for as many zoos as possible to complete the accompanying questionnaire, which will help us better understand the position of the whole sector at this difficult time. This will help us assess if this support is helping your industry.

Please save a copy and send back to us, with a copy of your current animal inventory list attached to the email, at: zoos.branch@defra.gov.uk. Please respond as soon as possible, and **by Friday 1st May** at the latest. Thank you.

You can contact us at the following email address with any questions:
zoos.branch@defra.gov.uk

Animal Welfare Team
Defra

5. A package of government financial support

You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the range of financial packages that the government has provided if you are facing temporary financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19. The schemes we expect to be of most relevance to the zoo sector are listed below.

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)

For small-or medium-sized businesses across the UK that are losing revenue, and seeing their cashflow disrupted, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Who is eligible?

- Your business must be a UK-based SME with annual turnover of up to £45m
- Your CBILS-backed facility must be used to support primarily trading in the UK
- Your business must generate more than 50% of its turnover from trading activity
- You must wish to borrow up to a maximum of £5m
- You must have a borrowing proposal which the lender would (a) consider viable, were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic and (b) believes will enable you to trade out of any short-term to medium-term difficulty

Extent: UK-wide

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils/>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873676/Covid-19_fact_sheet_18_March.pdf

Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme

This scheme will provide government guarantees of 80% to enable banks to make loans of up to £25m, offered to firms with a turnover of between £45m and £500m per annum that have been impacted by Covid-19 who are unable to secure regular commercial financing.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible, your business must:

- Be UK-based in its business activity
- Have an annual turnover between £45 million and £500 million
- Be unable to secure regular commercial financing
- Have a borrowing proposal which the lender:
 - would consider viable, were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic
 - believes will enable you to trade out of any short-term to medium-term difficulty

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-large-business-interruption-loan-scheme/>

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Employers can use a portal to claim 80% of furloughed employees' (employees on a leave of absence) usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage.

In summary:

- Temporary scheme for at least three months starting from 1 March 2020.
- Open to all UK employers that had created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on 28 February 2020.
- Applies to full-time/ part-time employees and employees on agency contracts and on flexible or zero-hour contracts.
- Businesses do not need to place all employees on furlough. However, those employees who are placed on furlough cannot undertake work for or on behalf of the organisation. This includes providing services or generating revenue.
- If an employee is working, but on reduced hours, or for reduced pay, they will not be eligible for this scheme.
- A furloughed employee can take part in volunteer work or training, as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for, or on behalf of the organisation.
- When the government ends the scheme, the business can decide whether furloughed employees can return to work or whether it is necessary to consider termination of employment (redundancy).

Extent: UK-wide

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

Reclaim the costs of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

Reclaim expenditure for employees who claim SSP for up to two weeks (per eligible employee) because they have been told to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

Who is eligible?

- Businesses with fewer than 250 employees that pay tax to the UK government as of 28 February 2020 are eligible.
- The eligible period for the scheme began on 13 March.

Extent: UK-wide

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19>

Tax helpline to support businesses affected by coronavirus (COVID-19)

A helpline number to support businesses and self-employed people concerned about not being able to pay their tax due to COVID-19.

In summary:

- HMRC will discuss specific circumstances and explore:
 - agreeing an instalment arrangement
 - suspending debt collection proceedings
 - cancelling penalties and interest where you have administrative difficulties contacting or paying HMRC immediately

If you run a business or are self-employed and are concerned about paying your tax due to coronavirus, you can call HMRC's helpline for help and advice: 0800 024 1222.

Extent: UK-wide

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tax-helpline-to-support-businesses-affected-by-coronavirus-covid-19>

VAT Deferral

Government will support businesses by deferring Value Added Tax (VAT) payments due between 20 March 2020 and 30 June 2020.

Who is eligible?

- All VAT-registered UK businesses are eligible.

This is an automatic offer with no applications required. UK Registered businesses will not need to make VAT payments normally due with VAT returns during this period. Taxpayers will be given until the end of the 2020-21 tax year to pay any liabilities that have accumulated during the deferral period. VAT refunds and reclaims will be paid by the government as normal.

Customers who normally pay by direct debit should cancel their direct debit with their bank if they are unable to pay. Please do so in sufficient time so that HMRC do not attempt to automatically collect on receipt of your VAT return.

Extent: UK-wide

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/vat-deferral/>

Cash Grant for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure

If your business is in the retail, hospitality or leisure sector, you will receive a cash grant of up to £25,000 per property. Zoos are part of the leisure sector, and therefore deemed eligible to receive a grant of up to £25,000 per property.

Who is eligible?

- Businesses in the retail, hospitality or leisure sector in England are entitled to a cash grant:
 - If they have a property with a rateable value of less than £15,000 then they will be entitled to a grant of £10,000
 - If they have a property with a rateable value of between £14,999 and £51,000 then they will be entitled to a cash grant of £25,000
- Eligible businesses will be contacted in the coming weeks by their Local Authority who will provide details of how to claim this money

Extent: England

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/cash-grant-for-retail-hospitality-and-leisure/>

Small Business Grant Funding

The government is providing additional funding for Local Authorities to support small businesses that already pay little or no business rates because of small business rate relief (SBRR), rural rate relief (RRR) and tapered relief. This will provide a one-off grant of £10,000 to eligible businesses to help meet their ongoing business costs.

Who is eligible?

- Your business must be based in England AND
- In receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief as of 11 March AND
- You must be a business that occupies property

Businesses should not have to apply but where they are concerned they could miss out they can contact their local authority.

Extent: England

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/small-business-grant-funding/>

Business Rates Holiday for 1 year from 1 April 2020

Businesses that occupy a property in the leisure or hospitality sectors may be eligible for the 100% discount on their business rates bill. Ratepayers that occupy more than one property will be entitled to relief for each of their eligible properties.

Who is eligible?

- Properties that will benefit from the relief will be occupied hereditaments that are wholly or mainly being used:
 - as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues;
 - for assembly and leisure; or
 - as hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation

- We consider assembly and leisure to mean hereditaments that are being used for the provision of sport, leisure and facilities to visiting members of the public (including for the viewing of such activities):
 - Sports grounds and clubs
 - Museums and art galleries
 - Nightclubs
 - Sport and leisure facilities
 - Stately homes and historic houses
 - Theatres
 - Tourist attractions
 - Gyms
 - Wellness centres, spas, massage parlours
 - Casinos, gambling clubs and bingo halls

Extent: England only

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-rates-retail-discount-guidance>

Further Resources

The government has produced guidance on COVID-19 for the public and for employees, employers and businesses. Please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

You should regularly check the online guidance on the available financial support for your region. This information can be accessed at the following links:

England

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

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>

Scotland

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland>

<https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/coronavirus-advice>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-guidance-information-for-ni-businesses-employers>

https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business?utm_source=InvestNI&utm_medium=Organic%20Traffic&utm_campaign=Coronavirus&utm_content=CV

HM Treasury has produced the following guidance: “How to access government financial support if you or your business has been affected by COVID-19”:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873676/Covid-19_fact_sheet_18_March.pdf

We would recommend that you explore the helpful resources provided in BIAZA’s Covid-19 resource library on their website: <https://biaza.org.uk/>

Beyond the Government support outlined above, you may have seen the recent announcement by the National Lottery Heritage Fund of its new £50 million Emergency Fund for charities. We would urge all eligible organisations in the zoo sector to apply. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/heritage-emergency-fund-launches-help-sector>

6. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Can zoo keepers continue to travel to work?

The government has released guidance on “Staying at home and away from others (social distancing)”. The Guidance provides four reasons where a person can leave their home. This includes “travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home”. We consider zoo keepers to be captured under this exception, as workers who cannot work from home. Zoo keepers can therefore continue to travel to work. Please note, it is still important to ensure that Public Health England guidelines, including maintaining a two-metre distance between staff at work and others when travelling to work, are followed to ensure everyone’s safety.

The guidance can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

2. Can zoo keepers and staff claim key worker status?

The Government has released “Guidance for schools, childcare providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision”. Under current Government guidance zoo keepers and zoo staff are not considered to be key workers. The guidance can be accessed at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

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

3. Will access to veterinary medicines continue uninterrupted?

Veterinary supply shops are permitted to remain open and suppliers of veterinary medicines have been listed in the key workers list.

The guidance can be accessed at the following links:

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

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

4. Can zoos transport and relocate animals?

In line with the government advice, we strongly advise against non-essential transport of animals, including zoo animals, unless they are being transported for emergency veterinary treatment or where the welfare of the animal would be compromised without transport.

Where journeys both domestically and internationally are deemed necessary; transporters must plan all journeys carefully, ensuring that the proposed journey is realistic and complies with all relevant legislation and that they have robust contingency plans in place.

5. Can zoos remain open to the public?

The government has published guidance specifying which businesses and venues must close. At present, zoos are not on the list of businesses and venues that have been ordered to close. However, considering the government restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including requiring the public to stay at home and limiting travel to essential journeys only, we do not expect zoos, as visitor attractions, to remain open to the public. We acknowledge that zoos must continue to operate to care for their collections and that most zoos have already closed their doors to visitors. If you choose to remain open, it is important to ensure that social distancing is effectively implemented and monitored for both staff and visitors.

The relevant guidance can be accessed at the following links:

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

6. Can staff continue to volunteer at their zoo if on furlough?

No. Individuals who are furloughed can volunteer for any organisation that is not their employer.