



## London Playbook

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# POLITICO London Playbook: Living with corona – Work from home long-term – Perspex screens scrapped

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By **ALEX WICKHAM**

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## Good Wednesday morning.

**SCOOP:** The *i* paper has appointed **Hugo Gye** as its new political editor, replacing Nigel Morris, who is retiring next month. No one on Twitter will have missed Hugo's daily tweets on the U.K.'s vaccine numbers — or the replies — and the promotion is a deserved reward for one of the must-follow journalists of the pandemic. Joining the *i* as its new deputy political editor is **Arj Singh**, a proven story-getter who regularly features in these emails and jumps over from HuffPost in a couple of weeks. **Emily Ferguson** has also been poached from the Express as a political reporter. Congratulations to all.

## LIVING WITH CORONA

**SCOOP:** Some form of working from home is set to continue for the long haul, offices could be required to install ventilation systems and a raft of other measures are likely to be needed even after England moves into “Step 4” of its coronavirus roadmap, a Whitehall document seen by Playbook reveals. The document outlines a series of recommendations now being considered by ministers on how the country can eventually “live with COVID,” as Boris Johnson has said will be necessary after restrictions are lifted on July 19. It also delivers stinging criticism of the existing government policy on sick pay, urging ministers to do more to support people isolating. These proposals are not yet final and no decisions have been taken as ministers await further data, but they show what is being discussed in government right now — and how the impact of the pandemic will still be felt on everyday life for a long time to come.

**Work from home long-term:** The most striking recommendation is that the government should not actively tell people to go back to the workplace when the country enters Step 4. The paper draws up three potential options on work-from-home messaging: the government could either tell the public to go back to work, remain neutral, or encourage people to work from home. Ministers are being advised to reject the first option, and instead err toward caution with a “hybrid approach.” While there should be no legal restrictions on who can go to work in Step 4, the document says, the government is actively looking at ways to help people continue working from home if there is no need for them to be in an office. This guidance is an intensely controversial subject already, with some senior ministers firmly against this proposal and arguing people should be directly encouraged to return to work as normal. A major row to watch out for in the coming weeks.

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social distancing laws are lifted, the document suggests. There is particular concern among scientific experts that there will be another spike in infections toward the winter that could put the NHS under heavy pressure, as the colder weather sees people meet up indoors where the virus is more easily transmissible. Some experts are lobbying ministers for stronger measures to be applied over the winter months.

**\*\*A message from Airbnb:** As tourism returns to UK communities recovering from COVID-19, Airbnb is calling for the introduction of a simple, statutory and nationwide registration system for the short-term letting sector. This will increase transparency for communities, hosts and guests — helping tourism to rebuild sustainably across the whole country.\*\*

**Isolation to continue:** The most obvious ongoing measure is likely to be that, for the foreseeable future, anyone experiencing COVID symptoms will be told to stay at home until they are cleared by a negative test. Government scientists have told ministers that there needs to be a culture change in Britain and that it will need to become normal for people with a new cough, a temperature or a loss of taste or smell to isolate at home until they are sure they don't have COVID — so nobody comes in spluttering to the office when they're unwell. There is a debate among scientists, officials and ministers over how long isolation will need to be a feature of life. It spans from some scientists arguing it needs to be the new norm forever, to other ministers wanting isolation to be phased out over a period of months.

**Ongoing border controls:** Ministers have been told it is also likely that some form of border controls and post-travel isolation will be needed for a significant period to prevent new variants from entering the country.

**Sick pay criticism:** A proper test, trace and isolate system is seen as fundamental to the country living with COVID, and an internal assessment of the existing policy of financial support for those required to isolate is damning. The assessment finds that the current isolation policy only has “low to medium” effectiveness because people on low incomes and in precarious work do not have adequate support. It says there are “barriers” and “disincentives” to isolating in terms of economic costs that ministers need to do more to address long-term, including providing better sick pay and further support for people isolating. These private internal findings are likely to provoke fierce criticism of the government from Labour types, who have been saying this for months.

**Vents and masks:** While social distancing laws are going to be lifted, ministers are considering bringing in new rules for businesses to help keep workplaces safe, including the possibility of requiring minimum standards of ventilation. There is also a suggestion that face masks will still be required in some settings long-term.

**Perspex screens scrapped:** Ministers are also being advised that those perspex screens that ha ×

transmission. Problems include them not being positioned correctly, with the possibility that they actually increase the risk of transmission by blocking airflow. Therefore there is clear guidance to ministers that these perspex screens should be scrapped.

**Government response:** The Cabinet Office stressed to Playbook that no decision has been made on what guidance will be brought in after July 19, and that it is too early to make any judgments as more data is needed. A government spokesperson said: “We have paused at Step 3 for up to four weeks due to the new Delta variant, and we will continue to assess the latest data on this variant over the coming weeks.” Nonetheless, even though the above proposals are very much at a draft stage, they offer some clear insight into ministers’ thinking on what life might be like this summer and possibly for a long time to come.

## DRIVING THE DAY

**JABS FOR JOBS:** Coronavirus vaccines will be mandatory for NHS workers and care home staff, several newspapers report this morning. The Guardian’s Denis Campbell was first out of the blocks last night, reporting that the decision had been made to require jabs for care home staff. The Times’ Steve Swinford then went further, reporting that Boris Johnson backs the move applying to all NHS workers. He says the government will open a consultation tomorrow on requiring vaccines as a condition of employment for NHS staff.

**Confirmation:** A Whitehall source confirmed the decision to Playbook last night. “These moves would save lives and there is precedent with the hepatitis B vaccine guidance for doctors,” they said.

**18 RATING:** The other eye-catching corona news of the comes on the front of the Telegraph, where Laura Donnelly and Robert Mendick report the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is set to advise ministers against vaccinating under-18s until more data is available on the risks, with a statement coming as soon as this week.

**Caveat:** A senior government source attempted to steer away from the story last night. They said: “Vaccines save lives. The Pfizer vaccine has been licensed for 12-15 year olds by the MHRA and a number of countries will be vaccinating children in those age groups. Ministers have not received advice and no decisions have been taken.” One to watch.

**MOGG-WATCH:** Tory disquiet over the “freedom delay” delay got louder yesterday as Commons Leader Jacob Rees-Mogg told Conservative Home he was against restrictions that “never end,” warning: “You can’t run society just to stop hospitals being full, otherwise you’d never let us get in our cars and drive anywhere ... there has to be some proportionality. The government doesn’t have the right to take charge of people’s lives purely to prevent them seeing the doctor.”

**Don’t forget your real job, Hugo:** The pace of the vaccine rollout will actually slow down in the coming weeks, as a lack of Pfizer vaccines affects the number of first doses for younger people. ✕

the i's Hugo Gye reports. On the plus, the slowdown won't prevent the government from meeting its new targets of a first dose for all over-18s and two-thirds of all adults double jabbed by July 19.

**POLL SCOOP:** Fifty-four percent of Britons believe the “lab leak” theory that the coronavirus emanated from a lab in Wuhan, China, according to a poll of 2,000 members of the public by JL Partners, shared with Playbook. Twenty-five percent said they thought the lab leak theory was “false” and 21 percent said they didn't know. It comes after Boris Johnson and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab last week downplayed the likelihood of the lab leak theory, but U.S. President Joe Biden said he was keeping an open mind.

**\*\*POLITICO Live's virtual event: "Improving Europe's Health Technology Assessments" is happening on July 13 at 2:00 p.m. CEST.** Join the debate and learn more about how HTA can improve the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of Europe's health care systems. Register today\*\*

## TODAY IN WESTMINSTER

**IN PARLIAMENT:** Commons sits from 11.30 a.m. with Northern Ireland questions ... then Prime Minister's Questions at midday ... then the PM is giving a statement on the G7 and NATO summits ... followed by Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay with an update on the economy.

**Today ...** is private members' bills presentation day, and the House's Georgina Bailey has a handy run through of all 20 of the bills here.

**BENT COPPERS:** Met Police Chief Cressida Dick once again finds herself having to defend her position this morning after the independent inquiry into the death of private detective Daniel Morgan found the Met was “institutionally corrupt.” Morgan's brother Alastair called on Dick to consider resigning. The Guardian has a write-up of the report.

**How is she still in a job?** That's the question several papers are asking this morning, including the Mail, which splashes on the story and goes to town on the perennially scandal-hit police chief inside, asking “how can she cling on” after her failures over Jean Charles De Menezes, Operation Midland, Extinction Rebellion and the handling of the Morgan Inquiry. Not to mention the disaster-class over the Sarah Everard vigil earlier this year.

**Watt on earth?** The Met had another nightmare yesterday as BBC journalist Nick Watt was disgracefully set upon by a mob of crazed anti-lockdown cranks in Westminster. After being criticized for not intervening to protect Watt, the Met initially released a disingenuous statement claiming there were no officers “in the immediate vicinity of the incident,” despite video showing there were several right next to it taking place. They later released a second statement retracting the above, and saying they would look into their response. All in all, a pretty shocking day, and indeed year, for Cressida Dick and the Met



**OZ DEAL LATEST:** Trade Secretary Liz Truss has been interviewed by the [Sun's Harry Cole](#) on her Aussie trade deal. Top line on Environment Secretary George Eustice: “‘Of course, George is a winner too,’ she teased with a smirk, ‘everyone is a winner.’” Meanwhile, the [Indy's Rob Merrick](#) reports that the pledge to protect farmers with a cap on tariff-free imports for 15 years seems to have been dropped from the agreement.

**COMING TODAY:** The ban on commercial evictions introduced during the pandemic is set to be extended until 2022, reveals the [Telegraph's Lucy Fisher](#).

**HOW TO BENEFIT FROM BREXIT?** Tory MP Iain Duncan Smith has delivered his task force's report to the PM on “re-imagining regulation in the U.K.” post-Brexit. What are the upsides of “our newfound freedoms,” as Boris Johnson calls them? Trialling a digital pound, encouraging driverless cars and that old classic, cutting red tape, [Reuters reports](#).

**UNION NEWS:** Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove is considering abolishing English Votes for English Laws and allowing Scottish MPs to vote on English legislation, the [Times' Patrick Maguire](#) reports.

**BAD TO WORSE:** If you thought it was low (no pun intended) of Daniel Kawczynski to blame his height when he was investigated for bullying, hold onto your hat. Esther Webber [reports](#) today that he is writing a book on emotional intelligence, as he explained to BBC Radio Shropshire in an interview in which he also cast doubt on the sanctions process which found he ought to apologize. Esther hears he's now been referred back to the standards commissioner after that radio interview.

**Sit down for this:** In the interview, Kawczynski noted the commissioner had told him during the investigation that “because I'm a giant, if I'm saying something negative to somebody else, then it puts them under pressure. So she said, if you want to be critical of somebody you need to ask them to sit down and you both sit on chairs so that you are speaking to them on the same level. I can't help being six foot nine.” At least he should be at an advantage climbing out of the various holes he's dug.

**TONIGHT:** The first major political guest on GB News, as Chancellor Rishi Sunak is [interviewed](#) by Andrew Neil.

**One question:** Sunak will have to spend up to £4 billion more on pensioners from next year if he sticks to the Tory manifesto's “triple lock” promise, the [FT's Chris Giles and Delphine Strauss](#) report.

**CULTURE WAR LATEST:** “There are some people in the government who feel like the right way to win is to pick a fight on the culture war and to exploit division,” former No. 10 race adviser Samuel Kasumu tells the [Guardian's Aamna Mohdin](#).

**WHITE PRIVILEGE:** The Black Lives Matter protests that swept Britain in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by a white Minneapolis police officer last May sparked a series of internal memos in the U.K.'s trade department, my colleagues Graham Lanktree and Emilio Casalicchio reveal. Taking to the streets, top civil servants said, showed frustration at “white privilege” and institutional racism in Britain. But that message runs counter to the policy of the department’s top minister, the Trade Secretary Liz Truss, who also holds the government equalities brief.

**DISUNITED LEFT:** The bizarre battle to be the next Unite general secretary continues, with the left failing to agree on a single name to fight center candidate Gerard Coyne. LabourList’s Sienna Rodgers says talks to agree on one left candidate broke down yesterday, with three remaining in the race — Steve Turner, Sharon Graham and Howard Beckett (the latter of whom you may remember for his stupid tweet about Priti Patel). Top Corbynistas have been trying to get Beckett to stand aside to allow Turner a clear run. So far they’ve failed, handing Coyne a significant advantage ...

**COMMITTEE CORRIDOR:** Highlight of the day very much at the Northern Ireland committee at 9.30 a.m., which is hearing from Brexit Minister David Frost.

**STAY TUNED:** U.S. President Joe Biden’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin takes place today in Geneva. POLITICO’s Ryan Heath has your essential primer.

**\*\*A message from Airbnb:** As restrictions begin to ease and Brits plan summer staycations, Airbnb remains committed to helping people find unique and unforgettable travel experiences within the UK, all made possible by Hosts. For one day only, the Nation’s favourite street — Coronation Street — is offering super fans a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stay on its historic cobbles, only on Airbnb. Meanwhile in Scotland, whisky lovers can spend a night in the Annandale Distillery and become a distiller for a day — all while helping to spread the benefits of tourism away from the typical hotspots and into the Scottish Lowlands.\*\*

## **MEDIA ROUND**

**Trade Secretary Liz Truss broadcast round:** Sky News Breakfast (7.05 a.m.) ... Times Radio Breakfast (7.20 a.m.) ... Nick Ferrari at Breakfast (7.50 a.m.) ... ITV’s Good Morning Britain (8.30 a.m.).

**Also on the Today program:** Chair of the Independent Care Group **Mike Padgham** (7.10 a.m.) ... SAGE member and University of Liverpool professor **Calum Semple** (7.20 a.m.) ... Former Met Police Commissioner Lord **Ian Blair** (7.30 a.m.) ... Tory MP **Sajid Javid** (7.50 a.m.) ... Climate scientist Dr **Emily Shuckburgh** and **Julia King** (aka Baroness Brown), chair of the adaptation committee (8.10 a.m.).

**Also on Sky News Breakfast with Kay Burley:** Tory MP **Sajid Javid** (8.05 a.m.) ... London Mayor **Sadiq Khan** (8.20 a.m.)

**Also on Nick Ferrari at Breakfast:** Tory MP **Sajid Javid** (7.20 a.m.).

**Also on Times Radio Breakfast:** David Cameron's former Scotland adviser **Ramsay Jones** (7.12 a.m.) ... Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council **Andrey Kortunov** and **Leslie Vinjamuri**, director of the U.S. and Americas Program at Chatham House (8.00 a.m.) ... Tory MP **Simon Hoare** (8.20 a.m.) ... Welsh Health Minister **Eluned Morgan** (8.35 a.m.).

**Julia Hartley-Brewer breakfast show** (talkRADIO): Labour MP **Meg Hillier** (8.50 a.m.) ... Tory MP **Tim Loughton** (9.17 a.m.).

## TODAY'S FRONT PAGES

(Click on the publication's name to see its front page.)

**Daily Mail**: Rotten to the core.

**Daily Mirror**: Lifesaving kit should be there for everyone.

**Financial Times**: Chancellor faces £4bn bill to keep Tories' triple lock pension pledge.

**i**: Revealed: mental health crisis as NHS patients are turned away.

**Metro**: Now over 18s grab jabs.

**POLITICO UK**: UK trade department head urged staff to 'recognize white privilege' after BLM protests.



**The Daily Telegraph**: 'No green light to start vaccinating children.'

**The Guardian**: Covid vaccinations to be made mandatory for care home.

**The Sun**: Ab Drab Britain.

**The Times**: Mandatory Covid jabs for NHS and care home staff.

## LONDON CALLING

**WESTMINSTER WEATHER:**    Sunny and hot. Highs of 29C. And then the storms are coming ...

**NEW GIG:** **Mikey Smith** is the Mirror's new Whitehall correspondent. Here's his [tweet](#).



**TOP TIPS:** If you're planning to head over to the Continent this summer, my POLITICO colleague Hanne Cokelaere has [this handy FAQ](#) on the rules around the EU.

**BIRTHDAYS:** Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross MP **Jamie Stone** ... Labour's **Cat Smith** ... Tory MP **Andrea Jenkyns** ... Meon Valley MP **Flick Drummond** ... Labour peer and former Shadow Attorney General **Shami Chakrabarti** ... Home office Permanent Secretary **Matthew Rycroft** ... Gordon MP **Richard Thomson** ... Tory peer **John Astor** ... Tory peer **Howard Flight**.

**PLAYBOOK COULDN'T HAPPEN WITHOUT:** My editor **Zoya Sheftalovich**, reporter **Andrew McDonald** and producer **Miriam Webber**.

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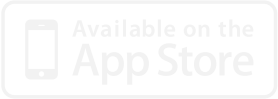
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