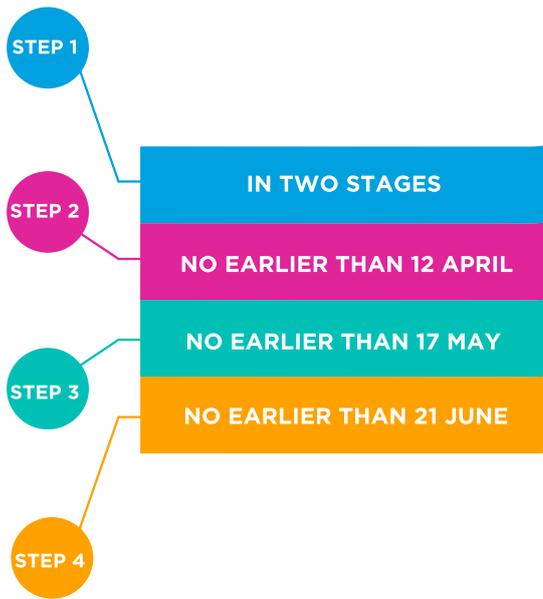


COVID-19 RESPONSE SPRING 2021: CHAMBER NETWORK SUMMARY



The Prime Minister announced England's roadmap out of the national lockdown on [Monday 22 February](#). The roadmap covers social distancing questions as well business reopening and other business critical factors (such as vaccination of adults).

This note is produced by and on behalf of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), which represent and campaign for business, championing and supporting our members all across the UK and in countries and markets around the world, as an aid to our members' understanding.



REOPENING

Within a national, not regional, model, four main 'steps' were outlined for the reopening, each (provisionally) timetabled for 5 weeks after the earlier one.

STEP 1 in two stages

8 March

Primary and Secondary schools and colleges permitted to reopen for face-to-face teaching, although there is some scope for individual establishments to stagger the return.

29 March

Outdoor fitness facilities reopening (e.g. golf courses, lidos).

STEP 2 no earlier than 12 April (confirmation by 5 April)

- Non-essential retail reopening
- Wellbeing services reopening (e.g. hair salons, nail care)
- Indoor fitness facilities reopening (e.g. gyms, swimming pools)
- Hospitality (e.g. pubs and bars) reopening, but only for outside service/consumption.

Household mixing will be permitted, subject to the Rule of 6 and/or a two household maximum (subject to review). There will be no need for a substantial meal to be purchased or an early closing time, although table service will remain as a requirement when on the premises.

STEP 3 no earlier than 17 May (confirmation by 10 May)

- Indoor hospitality reopening, including theatres
- Some large events, including indoor, reopening subject to capacity limits

STEP 4 no earlier than 21 June (confirmation by 14 June)

- Nightclubs and larger events reopening

The indicative dates given are 'earliest possible' dates, and could change as the underlying data change. At present, businesses will return under current health and hygiene requirements.

Progress through the Steps will not be automatic, and will depend on data on 4 measures: vaccination progress; vaccination reducing deaths and hospitalisation; infection rates relative to NHS capacity; and risks from new variants. Businesses will be given confirmation that the next step will be activated with at least one week's notice. A key issue for business communities will be exactly how the measures will be tested, and clarity over progress towards these goals in near-real time would assist business planning considerably.

There will be separate reviews of various key issues, such as social distancing measures, which we do not anticipate getting tougher but only weaker for so long as the virus continues to recede; 'vaccination certificates'; and international travel.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Perhaps the most important question left unanswered is the financial support which will be available to businesses, particularly the 'furlough' scheme ('CJRS'), cashflow support for businesses (noticeably less generous than wage-support) and continuing gaps in support (e.g. for self-employed Directors).

The PM and paper gave strong signals that financial support for companies will continue. How this will be put into effect is perhaps the most important issue facing businesses, and will only be answered in the Budget on 3 March and afterwards. The BCC submission is [here](#).

DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION IMPLICATIONS

The announcement on 22 February formally only related to England. The Prime Minister confirmed that the Government had worked and would continue to work with with the DAs, who would set out similar plans. Co-operation would continue, including to minimise issues for boundary communities.

CONCLUSION

In offering businesses a way out of lockdown, the announcement gives some hope of a pathway to normal trading. The UK government must make good on its promise that the re-opening will not be reversed. Businesses will want to see more clarity on how the four key measures will be applied and, if possible, regular 'status updates' from government, given that, for some, one week will not be enough notice to restart their operations properly. Additionally, dates for each of the reviews would assist considerably.

Even once allowed to operate, businesses will be looking carefully for signs that there is enough demand in the economy for their services, particularly those reliant on footfall.

As cashflow problems for companies increase for many, a really ambitious Budget will be required to stave off (at least in the short-term) the threat of spikes in unemployment. The UK government must very clearly establish how it will extend and expand the available support and avoid strangling an economic recovery with additional tax rises.