

Rates relief, Queens Innovation Awards, travel sector hit by COVID-19

Maddyness provides you with a quick digest of three news items to keep you up to date with the startup scene, emerging trends and other noteworthy stories.

Government announces £10B in rates relief for businesses

In response to the coronavirus outbreak and as part of the different measures implemented to support the country's economy slowed by the crisis, UK-based businesses are expected to receive almost £10B in business rate relief. This sum can be compared to a discount of £9.7B on companies' rates bills this financial year. The support comes after the 2020 Budget increased business rates retail discount from 50% to 100% for 2020 to 2021.

New statistics published this week by the government show the business rate relief predicted by councils for businesses across England in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector. Those which may be the most hit by the pandemic, such as eligible shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs will pay no business rates whatsoever this financial year.

Businesses are benefiting from this scheme with discounts on their rates bills helping them with their cashflow. The government is committed to

compensating local authorities in full for the business rate relief with payments due to begin shortly.

“Today’s figures demonstrate that, through working with local authorities, we are giving businesses the support that they need during this national emergency; an unprecedented nearly £10B in business rates relief. The government was clear that we would do whatever it took to support local business and that is exactly what we are doing. We stand behind them and their employees as we work to protect the NHS and save lives.” – Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Queens Innovation Awards 2020 announced

What is it? The Queen’s Awards for Enterprise scheme, now in its 55th year, is recognised as a mark of excellence with awards going to UK businesses that demonstrate strong commercial success through innovative products or services. This year, 220 UK businesses have been recognised for their contribution to international trade, innovation, sustainable development and promoting opportunities through social mobility.

Historically, the Queen’s Award to Industry – the scheme’s original title – was instituted in 1965 by Royal Warrant. Ten years later, it became the Queen’s Awards for Export and Technology, with Environmental Achievement added in 1992. In 1999, the scheme became the Queen’s Awards for Enterprise with International Trade, Innovation and Sustainable Development as the categories. In 2017, a fourth category was introduced, Promoting Opportunity (through social mobility).

You can find the [200 awarded companies here](#).

UK airlines and travel firms fear bankruptcy if they refund cancelled trips

Recent research found that travel companies owe £7B for trips cancelled because of coronavirus but operators fear bankruptcy if they process the refunds. The UK's biggest airlines and holiday companies are breaking the law by denying refunds to customers for travel cancelled during the pandemic. Consumer groups have warned that the sector largely risks losing public confidence in booking travel, with Which? finding 20 of the UK's largest operators are illegally withholding refunds that should be paid within 14 days.

Instead, most have got vouchers or credit notes, and customers have complained they have been unable to obtain refunds online or get through to make a claim on the phone. On Monday Ryanair started telling its customers that they will have to wait until ["the COVID-19 emergency has passed"](#) if they want a refund for a cancelled flight.

Travel operators and airlines are clearly breaking the law by not refunding customers. Thousands of complaints were received and requests for help from people struggling to get refunds for cancelled trips, with vouchers or credit notes being worthless if the firms collapse. However, Which? encourages the government to intervene, recognising that firms were under "unprecedented strain" and could go out of business should they process refunds immediately.

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