

[Press release: FCO Statement on the attack at Kerch Polytechnic College in Crimea](#)



Following the attack at Kerch Polytechnic College in Crimea, a Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesperson said:

We are deeply saddened by the attack at Kerch Polytechnic College in Crimea, which killed and injured multiple people, many of whom were children.

The UK offers its sincere condolences and sympathy to the families and friends of those who were killed, and wishes a swift recovery to the injured.

Further information

Published 18 October 2018

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Further information

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[News story: Executive Formation & Exercise of Functions Bill introduced into Parliament](#)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, today introduced new legislation to facilitate her clear plan to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland.

The Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions Bill creates a period where an Executive can be formed at any time, during which there will be no duty to call an election.

This will provide an opportunity and the necessary time and space to restart political talks with the aim of restoring devolved government as soon as possible.

The Bill provides certainty for Northern Ireland departments to ensure the

continued delivery of public services. It includes a requirement for the Secretary of State to issue guidance for Northern Ireland departments to support the decision making process in the absence of Ministers.

The Bill also addresses the urgent need for public appointments to certain bodies and offices that cannot be made in the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers.

The Secretary of State said:

At the heart of the Belfast Agreement is a devolved power-sharing Government in Northern Ireland. This Bill gives the best chance of delivering that.

In the meantime, it is imperative that Northern Ireland departments have clarity, so that decisions can be taken in the public interest to maintain delivery of Northern Ireland's public services in the absence of Ministers, and the guidance we have published today alongside the Bill will support civil servants in carrying out their duties.

Once this legislation is passed by Parliament, it will help the political parties to use the next few months to get around the table and come to an agreement , so that the people of Northern Ireland have locally-elected government to take important decisions on their behalf.

The Bill covers three areas:

Executive formation

The Bill provides for a 5-month period during which an Executive may be formed at any point without further primary legislation or an Assembly election, and removes the duty to propose a date for an election during that period, providing a further opportunity to re-establish political dialogue and restore the Executive as soon as possible.

Departmental decision-making

The Bill contains provisions to give greater clarity and certainty to enable Northern Ireland departments to continue to take decisions in Northern Ireland in the public interest, to ensure the continued delivery of public services. The Bill clarifies that a senior officer of a Northern Ireland department is not prevented from exercising functions of the department during the period for forming an Executive where it is in the public interest to do so, and in doing so to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. This guidance will not identify or direct specific decisions but

will set out principles to be taken into account when deciding whether or not it is in the public interest to exercise a function. A draft version of that guidance has also been published today.

Public appointments

The Bill enables UK Government Ministers to make key public appointments specified on the face of the Bill, which would normally be made by Northern Ireland Ministers. These are the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, Northern Ireland Policing Board (and approval of the Board's appointments of senior police officers), The Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

Notes to Editors

The Bill has been introduced in the House of Commons today and will be debated on Wednesday 24 October.

The Bill, Explanatory Notes and guidance for the Northern Ireland Civil Servants is attached and are also available on [the Parliament website](#)

[News story: Adults to benefit from digital skills overhaul](#)

Adult digital skills qualifications are to be overhauled under [plans](#) announced today (18 October) by Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton to help more people of all ages benefit from getting online.

The latest [survey](#) estimates that 11.3 million adults in the UK do not have the full range of basic digital skills required to operate effectively in day to day life – like sending an email or completing an online form – and 4.3 million have no digital skills at all. With an estimated 90% of all jobs in the next 20 years requiring some form of digital knowledge, it is vitally important that everyone, whatever their age or background, can gain the skills they need in an increasingly online world.

Getting digitally active is not just good for the economy, but has a wide range of positive personal benefits. [Research](#) shows that over 70% people aged over 55 say being online means they can do things more quickly, like paying bills, and that it helps reduce feelings of isolation.

To help boost adult digital skills the government has launched a consultation during Get Online Week setting out plans to:

- Overhaul the current national standards setting out the core digital skills people need to get on in life and work – supporting them to use

digital devices like tablets, smart phones and laptop computers, and to perform everyday activities that most people take for granted like how to navigate the internet, send an email, complete online forms and make online payments.

- Introduce improved basic digital skills qualifications at two levels – beginner and essential.
- Introduce a nationwide entitlement for all adults without basic digital skills to enrol on the new qualifications free of charge from 2020

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

We have a big challenge to tackle. Technology is advancing quickly, but one in five of us in the UK don't have basic digital skills. That means it might be a struggle to send an email, search on the internet, or shop online.

Being able to get online is so important. It opens up a whole host of information, including being able to apply for jobs. It is also an important way to keep in touch with friends and family.

I want people of all ages to have the skills and confidence they need for work and everyday life, so I'm thrilled to launch this consultation today to hear what you think of our plans!

Minister for Digital Margot James said:

Everyone should be able to take advantage of digital technology, whether it is learning how to send emails or developing specialist skills to work in a tech role.

We have launched a Digital Inclusion Fund and a Digital Innovation Fund to help boost older people's technology skills and attract a more diverse range of people into digital industries.

These will also help us maintain our position as a world-leading digital economy.

The Good Things Foundation's Chief Executive Helen Milner said:

We're delighted that adults who lack essential digital skills will be able to benefit from free support to gain these skills. Putting digital literacy on the same footing as English and Maths is an important step, recognising the centrality of digital skills in the modern world.

In doing so, it is vital that we don't leave anyone behind, and that in particular we reach and support the most excluded in society who are more likely to lack digital skills. Having a

single, agreed set of national standards will also ensure that providers of digital skills are working towards the same goal: helping as many adults as possible use digital to be happier, healthier and better off.

The consultation follows the publication of the [2017 UK Digital Strategy](#) which set out an ambition for everyone to have the core digital skills they need to fully participate in society, as well as the announcement in January of full funding for adults who need to take basic digital skills courses from 2020.

The measures will build on steps already taken to drive up the government's digital offer including making computing a statutory national curriculum subject, and introducing a new Computer Science GCSE and A Level.

The government also recently announced a [£1m Digital Skills Innovation Fund](#) to help people from underrepresented groups gain the skills they need to work in digital roles, and the new £400,000 Digital Inclusion Fund which was launched to help older and disabled people acquire digital skills.

Innovative projects are expected to include the teaching of basic skills such as booking GP appointments online, using apps to communicate with friends and family, and making the most of search engines.

Digital skills also form a core part of all our new high quality standards for new apprenticeships and T Levels. The government is also working closely with top tech companies to develop dedicated digital apprenticeships and T Levels.

[Press release: Duke of Cambridge unveils the UK's new fusion project at Culham](#)

The Duke of Cambridge visited one of the hottest places in the Solar System today when he joined the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) at Culham Science Centre near Oxford to see a potentially world-changing energy project.

During Green GB Week, it was a particularly fitting time to view research into nuclear fusion – the power source of the Sun – and how it could be commercialised to provide huge amounts of low-carbon electricity.

The Duke heard about the five-year project to build a machine capable of creating artificial stars and stood yards away from the MAST Upgrade chamber where, in a few months' time, temperatures of 50 million degrees C will be

created – over three times hotter than the Sun. He then ran a test of a ‘plasma’ – the hot gas that will form inside MAST Upgrade when it operates.

The UK Atomic Energy Authority runs the UK’s national fusion research lab at Culham, and its £50 million MAST Upgrade device will put Britain at the forefront of international research when it starts up in 2019. MAST Upgrade will explore whether smaller reactors – the so-called ‘spherical tokamak’ design – could make future fusion power cheaper. It will also trial a novel way to exhaust heat from the large fusion reactors that are expected to be on the grid by the middle of the century.

UKAEA’s CEO Professor Ian Chapman said:

It was a privilege to welcome The Duke of Cambridge to Culham as we prepare to start a major new fusion experiment.

The report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change last week reminded us how badly the world needs cleaner energy. We think fusion has a big role to play. The fuels are abundant around the globe, it doesn’t release greenhouse gases and it doesn’t produce long-lived radioactive waste like the nuclear fission power we have today. Building a star on Earth is very difficult – but the research is fascinating and knowing that we could change the world is a big motivation.

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Notes to Editors

UK Atomic Energy Authority

The UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) carries out fusion energy research on behalf of the Government at Culham Science Centre near Abingdon. It is also developing Culham as a location of hi-tech research and business, with around 40 tenant companies now on site. UKAEA’s fusion lab Culham Centre for Fusion Energy oversees Britain’s fusion programme, headed by the MAST Upgrade (Mega Amp Spherical Tokamak) experiment. It also hosts the world’s largest fusion research facility, JET (Joint European Torus), which it operates for European scientists under a contract with the European Commission. [More information](#)

Fusion energy research

Fusion research aims to copy the process which powers the Sun for a new large-scale source of clean energy here on Earth. When light atomic nuclei fuse together to form heavier ones, a large amount of energy is released. To do this, fuel is heated to extreme temperatures, hotter than the centre of

the Sun, forming a plasma in which fusion reactions take place. A commercial power station will use the energy produced by fusion reactions to generate electricity.

Nuclear fusion has huge potential as a long-term energy source that is environmentally responsible (with no carbon emissions) and inherently safe, with abundant and widespread fuel resources (the raw materials are found in seawater and the Earth's crust). Researchers at Culham are developing a type of fusion reactor known as a 'tokamak' – a magnetic chamber in which plasma is heated and controlled. The research is focused on preparing for the international tokamak experiment ITER, now being built in southern France. ITER – due to start up in 2025 – is designed to show that fusion can work on the scale of a powerplant, and if successful should lead to electricity from fusion being on the grid by 2050.

Fusion research at Culham is funded by the [Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council](#) and by the European Union under the EURATOM treaty.

MAST Upgrade

MAST Upgrade is a £50 million fusion experiment launching at Culham in 2019. It will explore technology for the first fusion power stations and take on one of the biggest challenges in fusion research: 'plasma exhaust', or how to exhaust excess heat from fusion reactors. This is a challenge that must be solved if fusion reactors are to be commercially viable. MAST Upgrade is the first experiment to trial an innovative exhaust system called the Super-X Divertor.

MAST Upgrade will also develop a promising design for smaller, cheaper fusion reactors – the spherical tokamak. MAST Upgrade is mainly funded by the UK Government (Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) with additional contributions from EUROfusion, and from collaborators at UK universities and from the United States.

Green GB Week

Green GB Week is a week of activities between 15-19 October, bringing together businesses, groups and communities to promote the opportunities of clean growth and to highlight actions for tackling climate change. [More information](#)