

Press release: Downing Street hosts St David's Day reception to celebrate Wales' national day

The Welsh flag will be flying proudly above Downing Street today when Prime Minister Theresa May welcomes guests from Welsh business, tourism, sport and media to a reception to celebrate St David's Day (1 March).

The very best in Welsh food and drink suppliers will showcase their products at the event including Welsh whisky from Penderyn, wine from Glyndwr Vinyard and Welsh produce from Cwm Farm Charcuterie.

There will also be performances from the London based Welsh choir Cor y Boro, and harpist Rhys Ward-Haugh.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Today's reception is all about celebrating everything that Wales has to offer to the world – and there is indeed much to celebrate.

We are a proud nation – and a special part of the United Kingdom. And we are home to some of the greatest talent and industry in the world.

We have Welsh entrepreneurs, inventors and creative people leaving an indelible mark all around the globe, each overseeing Wales' tremendous renaissance in sport, cuisine, arts and business.

I'm delighted to join the Prime Minister in welcoming Wales to Downing Street today, and extend my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating St David's Day around the world.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Images from the event will be available from the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales communications team post reception.

2. Suppliers at the St David's Day reception are:

- Penderyn – Brecon
- Ridiculously Rich – Aberaeron (Alana Spencer 'Apprentice' winner)
- Tregroes Waffles – Teifi Valley
- Jones o Gymru crisps – Conwy
- Glyndwr Vineyard – Vale of Glamorgan
- Cwm Farm Charcuterie – Neath Port Talbot

Speech: Reiterating the call for a 30-day ceasefire, without delay, in Syria

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you also to Under-Secretary Generals Lowcock and Feltman for their clear and factual briefings and for reiterating to all of us on this Council the ongoing horror of the conflict in Syria, and in particular in Eastern Ghouta, because that is where it is clear the situation is most dire by a huge order of magnitude.

It was five days ago that we sat in this Council and all of us raised our hands in support of a 30-day ceasefire, which we hoped would provide some relief to Syria's people. This was a desperately needed step. A step that came too late for many. In Eastern Ghouta alone, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that at least 630 people were killed and 3,000 injured in the week before Resolution 2401 was agreed, with women and children representing nearly 60 percent of the wounded and 50 percent of the deceased. We continue, as well, to condemn attacks on Damascus from Eastern Ghouta.

Let us recall the demands of our resolution. It called for at least a 30-day ceasefire, without delay, to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuation.

Without delay means right now. Immediately. That there should be no delay. We all voted for these demands and we committed to use our influence to ensure this.

In response, Russia has declared a five-hour daily humanitarian window. That is not what this Council demanded, nor what Russia agreed to use its influence to ensure. A five-hour window has not delivered and cannot deliver any meaningful improvement on the ground. Under-Secretary General Lowcock has made clear that the United Nations cannot get humanitarian convoys in and out within that timeframe, as has the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Humanitarian pauses of a few meagre hours are no substitute for a sustained ceasefire, which is vital to ensure delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations. If Russia is able to deliver a five-hour pause, let it deliver a 24 hour one, as they agreed on Saturday.

Mr President,

Let us now take stock of the situation in Syria, and specifically in Eastern Ghouta where the situation is at its most desperate, and review if any real

change has occurred in the past five days. Has the resolution been implemented? Has there been a ceasefire? Any delivery of humanitarian aid? Or any medical evacuations? Has the passing of this resolution bought any relief to the people of Syria?

The fighting has not stopped. All of the main armed opposition groups have committed to the full implementation of Resolution 2401. The Assad regime has not, and has in fact ignored the resolution we passed. Reports of attacks and airstrikes by pro-regime forces continue. 22 airstrikes reportedly took place even during Russia's so-called humanitarian pause.

And, as if it could not get any worse, there have been disturbing reports of use of chlorine gas. Doctors in Eastern Ghouta reported to the Syrian American Medical Society that 16 patients, including six children, were suffering from symptoms indicative to exposure to chemical compounds following an alleged regime attack on Sunday, only one day after the resolution was passed.

Since Saturday, not a single aid convoy has been able to access Eastern Ghouta to provide relief to the desperate civilians.

The World Health Organisation estimates that one thousand people are now in need of medical evacuation from Eastern Ghouta. None have been evacuated since the resolution was passed.

The consequences of the failure to implement the resolution are clear. The casualties continue to rise. The horror continues. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights report at least 14 civilians, including three children, were killed on Sunday.

In short, in the words of one doctor from Eastern Ghouta, "nothing has changed."

Mr President,

It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that Resolution 2401 is enacted in full.

In the words of my Foreign Secretary, "The Assad regime must allow the UN to deliver humanitarian aid, in compliance with Resolution 2401, and we look to Russia and Iran to make sure this happens, in accordance with their own promises."

I implore all those with influence over the Syrian regime to act now to ensure that the ceasefire, which they supported in this chamber, is implemented in full and immediately.

To do anything less is an affront to this Council, this United Nations and the international system that we live by.

We will continue to monitor implementation of Resolution 2401 and commit to returning to this Council regularly until we see it respected.

Thank you Mr President.

Speech: Telegraph's Investing in Britain Forum: Chief Secretary's speech

I am excited for the future economic prospects of our country.

Of course, in my job, I can see there are economic challenges ahead of us.

But when I travel around the country, I see lots of exciting things happening.

From Liverpool and its super-port, which will now be able to take ships through the Panama Canal;

To Bristol with its world leading high-tech spin outs;

To Cardiff where the Welsh dragon is roaring.

All of these are contributing to our economic story.

GDP has grown for five years solid.

Employment is at near record levels.

And manufacturing has had its longest growth streak in 30 years.

I am ambitious about the future.

So I want to ask, how do we make Britain the most energetic, most exciting economy on Earth?

We already have the five foundations of our Industrial Strategy to boost productivity and earning power by investment in skills and infrastructure.

But I want to lay out five more secrets of Britain's future economic success.

Number 1: we must celebrate entrepreneurs and encourage individual endeavour.

I have an instinctive admiration for the individuals who take risks and start something new.

The academics who left Oxford to establish the University of Cambridge in the 13th century. Without those mavericks, we may never have built the first computer, discovered the structure of DNA, or split the atom.

And I admire Anita Roddick who cared about ethical purchase and founded the Body Shop.

And the 12 people who were laid off by BBC Micro, who kept believing in themselves and founded ARM, which now powers around 90% of the world's microprocessors.

Underlying these achievements is the creative urge of individuals who wanted to change the status quo for the better.

Millennials are often derided as soft and lazy. But I have found this generation one of the most independently-minded, enterprising and anti-establishment of our times. They have the courage to do things differently, develop new technologies and challenge traditional industries.

And I want to make sure Britain has a culture that encourages the thrill-ride of risk and reward, for today's entrepreneurs – and tomorrow's.

Number 2: we need to keep control of the size of government.

It is a basic fact that state-owned companies compete for space and resources with private companies, starving them of oxygen.

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If taxes get too high, the desire to work, or set up a company is reduced.

Of course, we need taxes to fund universal education, healthcare, a welfare safety net, pensions, police and armed forces.

We currently spend £28,500 per household to make this happen and make sure everyone has a fair chance.

But it's a delicate balance. When taxation goes too far, we end up wasting money, and losing trust.

If it gets out of control, working people and successful companies are punished, in order to plump the pillows of the privileged, and resuscitate lumbering zombie companies, long past their best.

That's why we must maintain vigilant and control of the size of government.

Number 3: I believe in the benefits of shaking up markets.

I am resolutely on the side of new entrants and upstarts when others attempt to stop them entering the market.

And I'm aware there are those who want to shut down the new economy.

Those who campaign against Uber.

Those who rail against Airbnb.

The record labels in a tug-of-war with music streaming services.

But I am instinctively pro-disruption and anti-vested interests. It's in my interest, because it gives me more freedom: I can go where I want, when I want, stay where I want – and listen to Whitney Houston whenever I want.

I am proud of what we've done to encourage competition.

We've made it easier for expanding businesses to take on new staff.

We've taken over a million self-employed people out of restrictive and costly health and safety regulations, because they posed no danger to others.

And we've authorised 15 new banks, reducing the market share of the big four in the UK.

But we have to go further. In the utilities sector, despite our independent regulators, the big incumbents still don't face enough competition.

Perhaps we should learn from South Korea, where utilities are viewed as a single market and have to compete against each other. This has resulted in very low cost and high roll-out of all utilities.

The last time UK utilities regulation had a serious shake-up was the 1990s, before the emergence of internet.

Number 4: we have to keep our important professions open to newcomers.

Just as we need to enable new entrants to succeed in the market, we need to enable new entrants in the workplace.

British professions are some of the best in the world, but elements within seem to be constantly lobbying to put barriers up to prevent new people joining them.

We know that professional regulations can be a damaging restraint on trade. They can reduce opportunities, keep women out of the best roles, and limit the overall number of jobs available.

This is nothing new. In the 18th century, James Watt, who would later become the inventor of the revolutionary Watt engine, was denied a job in the city of Glasgow by the local guild of instrument-makers. Why? Because he had done his apprenticeship 25 miles up the road in Greenock.

Today, licensing is the most restrictive form of occupational regulation in the UK, covering around a quarter of groups in the labour market. We now have more regulated occupations than France, Italy or Belgium.

We are working hard to address this.

We've introduced free schools – where teachers don't have to have traditional training and instead bring other experience to those roles.

We've brought nurse associates into hospitals to help the established nursing teams deliver first-rate care.

We've encouraged the growth of Alternative Business Structures, which can provide certain legal services without having to identify as a law firm.

But we must try harder. For my part, I am doing my best to open up politics, once a closed shop for men only, to more women – and particularly those from the North!

Number 5: we must take on the NIMBYs

Opening up planning and building houses in the right places is the fastest things we could do to boost our country's productivity.

When I moved to London from Leeds as a graduate in the 1990s, I came because of the opportunities on offer here. I could afford to find somewhere to live. But young people these days struggle to get flats near their jobs.

This is deeply economically damaging, as growing companies need to attract new staff to continue developing.

And we know this would help increase wages: doubling the size of a city leads to an increase in its productivity of up to 5%.

But it's not just about economics. Accepting the status quo is bitterly unfair.

There are lots of claims that increasing return to capital, rather than workers, is being driven by industrial and technological factors.

But in fact, according to a study by the American economist, Matthew Rognlie, increasing wealth inequality can be blamed almost entirely on disparities in housing wealth.

That's why Sajid Javid's bold planning reforms are so important.

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We also need to liberate business planning in high-growth, free enterprise areas, and remove the strict controls that get in the way of prosperity.

That's why we're piloting a manufacturing zone in the East Midlands, where all the planning is pre-agreed and manufacturers can get straight to work on building their factories.

And we could do even more. I would like to see more of the development model used to build Canary Wharf.

We could see it bettered up in Leeds or Newcastle – a Canary North!

What could stop us taking advantage of these opportunities? What could stop us unleashing the secrets of our success?

The answer is – those people with a vested interest in more government.

They want a thicket of regulation to grow, as they are the ones who know how

to hack through it. Who benefit from the status quo, oppose change, and want to pull up the ladder behind them.

They can be the lobbyists.

They can be the unions.

They can be the bureaucrats.

They can be the NIMBYs.

I call them The Blob. Gloopy. Treacly. Hard to define. Harder to resist.

They say they want to protect people and jobs. They say they only want this tiny change in legislation. And they will ask again and again for government favours – arguing that they are the exception, that their cause deserves coddling and sympathy.

This effect is described in *The Captured Economy*, by Brink Lindsey and Steven Teles.

They talk about the situation in the US, where too many companies are lured away from truly productive activities, and towards rent-seeking, hunting for special favours and handouts.

I believe one of the main roles of government – and this government in particular – is to challenge, not succumb, to the Blob and to keep our economy free and fair.

It's vital to our mission that we fight the forces of vested interest and make sure our country's opportunities are open to everyone – big or small, north or south, man or woman.

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I am confident that we can continue to hold back the forces of The Blob.

Britain is the home of economic freedom, with liberty guaranteed by the independence of our state institutions, and an absence of corruption assured by transparency.

We've come a long way in the last seven years – championing free enterprise, tackling the abuse of lobbying and keeping the voices of protectionism at bay.

There are many countries across the world that do not get this right, and give in to the intoxicating embrace of institutionalised corruption. Even seemingly healthy democratic countries.

Because the biggest secret is what we don't do, rather than what we do do. We are a free country where we eschew suffocating central control and regimented planning.

We believe individuals makes better decisions for themselves. And we believe

in people being the agents, not the victims, of their economic destiny.

Thank you.

News story: Transport Secretary Chris Grayling commits to delivering a modern railway in the south-west resilient to extreme weather

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has today (28 February 2018) committed to delivering a modern railway in the south-west that is resilient to extreme weather, in the [government's response to a report by the Peninsula Rail Task Force](#).

Improving the resilience of the South West Peninsula is part of the biggest overhaul of the Great Western route since Brunel started work on the line more than 175 years ago, with £5.7 billion being invested in modernising the line and improving journeys for passengers. Central to this vision are upgrades to stretches of railway that run close to the sea through Teignmouth and Dawlish, safeguarding their future against damage as when storms washed away part of the line at Dawlish in 2014.

The government has already provided £15 million for Network Rail to design a long-lasting solution to this problem, in addition to the £40 million spent by Network Rail to repair the damage caused in the 2014 storm.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

We are investing in the biggest modernisation of our railway network since Victorian times, providing faster, more reliable and more frequent services for passengers across the country.

The 2014 storms caused devastation to Dawlish and huge disruption followed. It has been a key priority since I became Transport Secretary.

That's why we're investing in the infrastructure of the region – making it easier for people to get around and better connecting the south west to the rest of the country. And that's why sorting out the route through Dawlish is my number one national rail priority.

From the summer, passengers will be also able to take advantage of 29 Intercity Express trains running from London to Penzance. The new bi-mode

trains will provide faster, more comfortable and more reliable services, adding an additional 1000 peak time seats compared to today.

Other improvements include:

- the start of a two-train per hour service between Plymouth and Penzance.
- the end of 'Pacer' trains
- free Wi-Fi on all GWR trains
- substantial car park extensions at stations across the peninsula including a completed scheme at Tiverton Parkway and further schemes at St Erth and Taunton
- investment of £9 million to update the Cornish sleeper service
- instructing GWR to examine how the line between Exeter and Okehampton could see the reinstatement of regular train services.

Elsewhere in the region:

- the government is investing more than £1.6 billion in upgrading the A303 near Stonehenge, linking the south-east and the M5 in the south-west to improve journey times, reduce congestion and improve air quality for millions of people, while also supporting 120,000 extra jobs and 100,000 new homes across the region
- local authorities will benefit from £1.3 billion funding to maintain local roads in the current funding period
- the government awarded more than £970 million in local growth funding to boost jobs and business in the area
- the government announced at the Budget to invest £79 million to build the A30 link road for St Austell
- the government is investing £60 million in a series of local road schemes, with funding from the National Productivity Investment Fund

News story: Minister welcomes 'accountability revolution' in higher education

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah has called on the new universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), to put a "laser-like focus on students" at its inaugural conference today (28 February).

[Speaking](#) to leading figures from the Higher Education sector at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London, the Minister outlined the significant progress that has been made by the Government to establish the OfS.

At a time when the university sector is experiencing unprecedented levels of scrutiny, the Minister set out how the launch of the OfS signified "a new age

– the age of the student”. He called on the sector to embrace this new era and made clear that he expects the OfS to put student interests at the centre of everything they do.

The conference marked the publication of the [OfS new framework](#) – a blueprint for higher education – and the biggest regulatory change in Higher Education in over a quarter of a century. The truly modern framework will ensure our world-class universities are able to rise to the challenges of the future.

In his speech, the Minister set out his vision for a successful higher education sector, including how universities must fulfil their vital civic duty in society by championing student interests and transforming their lives.

Speaking at the OfS conference today, Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

Since taking office I have visited universities around the country to talk to students and listen to their hopes and concerns.

What students have told me is that they value excellent teaching, high quality information and want a system that is responsive to their needs.

The new regulator will have real powers to deliver these goals. By putting students’ interests first, the OfS will play a key role in delivering an accountability revolution.

The Office for Students will replace HEFCE and OFFA as the single regulator for higher education in England. It will take up its regulatory role in April 2018.

The minister’s speech can be read in full [here](#)

The Secretary of State’s guidance to the Office for Students is available [here](#)

The new Regulatory Framework is available [here](#)