

Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on the OPCW report into Amesbury

The independent report produced by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has today confirmed the assessment of the United Kingdom in identifying the chemical agent responsible for the death of Dawn Sturgess in Amesbury on 8 July. This was a Novichok nerve agent, of the same kind used in the attempted assassinations of Sergei and Yulia Skripal earlier this year.

Analysis carried out by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Porton Down had previously identified the nerve agent as Novichok.

Chemical weapons experts from the OPCW have twice visited the UK to collect samples for testing after this latest detection of chemical weapons use on the streets of the UK. All the samples returned equally conclusive results.

The Foreign Secretary said:

We are grateful to the OPCW for the independent, expert work in confirming the type of nerve agent used in Amesbury, and once again pay tribute to the high standards set by our world-leading scientists.

The recklessness of the Russian state in bringing a nerve agent in to the UK, and total disregard for the safety of the public, is appalling and irresponsible. Our thoughts are with the family of Dawn Sturgess, and with Charlie Rowley.

This is another reminder of the importance of the international community standing together to uphold the global ban on all use of chemical weapons, and ensure that the rules based international order is respected so we can all keep our citizens safe.

In the interests of transparency, the UK has requested that the OPCW publish the executive summary and share the full report with all state parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The police continue their investigation into the poisonings in Amesbury and Salisbury and we await their further conclusions.

Further information

Press release: New UK aid package to meet immediate needs of Palestinians through UN Relief and Works Agency



Children attending an UNRWA school in Gaza.

The UK will step up its support to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to help ensure vulnerable Palestinians are able to continue accessing vital healthcare and education services, Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt has announced.

The UN agency, which is facing severe financial pressure at a time of unprecedented demand, is a lifeline for millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.

Today's announcement of additional UK aid support from the Department for International Development aims to help UNRWA keep schools open for over 500,000 children, and provide medical care for 3.5 million refugees.

Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said:

UK aid support through UNRWA provides an essential humanitarian and stabilising force in the Middle East, educating hundreds of thousands of children every year and providing healthcare to some of the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees. Today's UK aid package reaffirms our unequivocal support to this UN agency and the important work it does.

We are deeply concerned about the devastating impact a shortage of funds for UNRWA could cause on those that rely on its services, as well as the consequences this could have for regional stability.

Whilst today's UK aid announcement will help to meet immediate needs, we are clear that the UK cannot act alone. For the sake of millions of Palestinians, the international community and other donors must follow our lead and step up support to UNRWA to ensure its vital services are not interrupted.

In March the UK announced that it was providing financial assistance earlier than originally planned to ensure some of the poorest Palestinians continue to receive education and healthcare. In June the UK provided an additional £10 million to help address the unexpected shortfall in funding, and meet growing beneficiary needs, particularly in Gaza.

Notes to editors

- Today's £7 million announcement brings the total UK contribution to UNRWA's Programme Budget to £45.5m.
- In the financial year 2018/19, the UK has already provided £38.5m to UNRWA to ensure core programmes and services remain uninterrupted.
- The £7 million is being provided by DFID in addition to its existing programme in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – this has been reallocated from other DFID programmes.

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1. 4 September 2018 Minor typo corrected.
2. 4 September 2018 First published.

[News story: Primary school standards continue to rise](#)

The statistics, based on this year's Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Assessments – commonly referred to as SATs and designed to measure school performance – show that schools that benefit from the freedoms academy status bring have had particular success in improving outcomes for pupils, with results improving the longer a school has been an academy.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb has welcomed the results and the improvements that have come from schools that became sponsored academies.

Figures published today (Tuesday 4 September) show:

- Academies open for the longest have the highest results:
- At converter academies open for one year, 65% of pupils reach the expected standards in reading, writing and maths; this figure rises to 71% in converter academies open for seven years; and
- At sponsored academies that typically converted because of poor performance, those that have had academy status for one year saw 53% of pupils meet the expected standards in reading, writing and maths, rising to 62% after seven years;
- The gender gap between boys and girls has remained stable, with girls outperforming boys by 8%; and
- London is the best performing region with Richmond Upon Thames the best

performing local authority in the country, followed by Trafford.

The new national curriculum and assessments have set a higher standard in schools and today's rising results show more pupils are meeting that standard, thanks to the hard work of teachers and pupils, and government reforms.

Earlier this year, figures showed:

- 64% of pupils met the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths. This figure was 61% in 2017;
- 75% of pupils met the expected standard in reading, compared to 71% last year and 66% in 2016
- 76% of pupils met the expected standard in maths, up by 1 percentage point;
- 78% of pupils met the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling, up by 1 percentage point; and
- 78% of pupils met the expected standard in writing. This figure was 76% in 2017.

This year's results are the third to be released following the introduction of a more rigorous national curriculum assessments in Summer 2016, bringing primary education in line with the best in the world. The tests assess how well schools are equipping pupils to go on to secondary school, rather than as a measure of individual pupils' performance.

Standards are rising in primary schools. In 2017 the attainment gap between disadvantaged primary pupils and their more affluent peers had narrowed by 10.5% since 2011.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

Today's results show how well schools have adapted to the higher expectations and greater challenge of the new primary curriculum. In the first SATs that tested pupils' achievements in 2016, just 66% reached the expected standard in reading. Today that figure is 75%.

Standards are rising in our primary schools and pupils starting secondary school for the first time this week will be better prepared for its new challenges than ever before.

The government has invested in programmes to help raise standards in our primary schools, including a £26 million network of specialist English Hubs around the country to improve pupils' literacy and £41 million to follow the same approach to teaching maths as world leading countries through the Shanghai Mastery for Maths programme. □ This is on top of wider changes to the primary assessment system which will reduce unnecessary workload for teachers so they can focus on what really matters in the classroom.

The introduction of phonics – where children learn to read by sounding out

and blending letter – has played a significant part the improvement in primary school standards. Since the introduction of phonics in 2012 154,000 more six-year-olds are now on track to be fluent readers and in the latest PIRLS results – an international study of reading at primary school – England achieved its highest ever score.

Today's figures build on the record 1.9 million children now in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 – an increase from 66% of pupils to 86%. The government is continuing to ensure all parents have a good school place on their doorstep, with the recent announcement of £680million to create 40,000 more good school places in primary and secondary schools. Since 2010, 825,000 new school places have been created, with recent analysis showing 91% of those in 2016-17 were in good or outstanding schools.

Statement to Parliament: Secretary of State: Statement to Parliament September 4th 2018

Thank you Mr Speaker, and with your permission, I'd like to provide the House with an update on the progress of Brexit negotiations and the government's No Deal contingency planning.

Exit Negotiations

On Friday I was in Brussels for the fourth time since I became Secretary of State, for a further round of talks with Michel Barnier.

We had an extended discussion, covering outstanding Withdrawal Agreement issues, internal and external security, and our future economic partnership.

We have injected some additional pace and intensity into the negotiations, as we reach the final phases.

The vast majority of the Withdrawal Agreement has been agreed. And when signed, the Agreement will:

- Safeguard the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU so they can continue to live their lives broadly as they do now;
- It will provide for a time-limited implementation period, giving businesses and citizens the certainty they deserve until we reach the new partnership; and
- It will allow for the UK to make an orderly and smooth transition as we move towards a future deep and special partnership with the EU.

In the course of August, we made further progress across a range of the

outstanding separation issues including:

Protection of data and information, the treatment of ongoing police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, and ongoing Union judicial and administrative procedures after exit.

So the scope and the contours of the Withdrawal Agreement are now clear, subject to some further technical detail that we will of course continue to work on.

Northern Ireland

At the same time Mr Speaker we continue work to complete a backstop to deal with the position of Northern Ireland and Ireland, as we committed to do in the December Joint Report with the EU.

As the government has made clear, the EU proposals are unacceptable, because they would create a customs border down the Irish Sea.

We are determined to reach a solution that protects the Belfast Agreement and avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland.

We will not permit a customs border down the Irish Sea, which would put at risk the constitutional and economic integrity of the United Kingdom, and of course, this can be done without compromising the EU's core principles.

Importantly, Mr Speaker, we look to meet our commitments to the people of Northern Ireland through our future partnership,

So that no backstop would ever need to come into effect.

Future relationship

Mr Speaker, the White Paper we published in July has served as the basis for constructive discussions on our future relationship with the EU.

I, my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister, and other Cabinet colleagues have made visits across Europe, explaining our proposals making the case for what we have put forward for our future relationship.

I can tell the House that since the publication of the White Paper, ministers have had more than 60 engagements ministerially with their counterparts across Europe.

I met the French Europe Minister in Paris recently, I saw the Swedish Foreign Minister and the Irish Foreign Minister in London.

And I also met with Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit coordinator last week.

And we've received a wide range of positive and constructive feedback.

Equally, just as we have presented our proposals in a spirit of compromise,

So too they have proved challenging in some respects for some in the EU.

But, our friends across Europe are engaging seriously with our proposals on the substance.

As my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister set out, we are committed to delivering on the vision in the White Paper,

And delivering a future relationship that will see:

- The United Kingdom leave the Single Market and the Customs Union;
- An end to free movement, so the UK controls its own borders;
- The end of the jurisdiction of the European Court; and
- And the UK and the EU meeting their shared commitments to Northern Ireland and Ireland in the way that I have already described.

And at the same time, we want to build up the foundations of a bright, strong and enduring new relationship for the future with:

- Frictionless trade across our borders;
- Continued close cooperation on law enforcement and other security matters;
- The UK free to develop its own independent trade policy; and
- Broader UK-EU cooperation from research to student exchanges, in many of the areas that we prize on both sides.

We approach these talks with ambition, pragmatism and with energy.

And if our EU friends match us, we will strike a deal that is in the clear and overwhelming interests of both sides.

No Deal Contingency Planning

Mr Speaker, I would also like to update the House on steps the Government has taken over the summer to prepare for the unlikely event that we don't reach a deal with the EU.

And while we expect to reach a deal with the EU, while it remains the most likely outcome, and whilst it remains our top and indeed our overriding priority, as a responsible government, we have a duty to prepare for any eventuality.

So on 23 August, we published 25 technical notices, intended to inform people, businesses and stakeholders about steps they need to take in the event of a 'no deal' scenario.

They build on the steady and patient work that has taken place over the last two years to prepare this country for life outside the EU – irrespective of the outcome of the negotiations.

That work has included passing key bits of legislation to ensure a smooth Brexit, including the EU (Withdrawal) Act,

It includes recruiting the staff in Whitehall and our operational agencies so we have the teams in place.

And it includes preparing our institutional capacity, from the Competition and Markets Authority to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The technical notices continue the same, responsible, practical approach to preparing our country for Brexit.

Among the technical notices, there is advice for businesses on some of the new processes they would be expected to follow when moving goods between the EU and UK in a no deal scenario.

Our technical notice on workplace rights sets out how workers in the UK will continue to be entitled to the rights they have under UK law.

And we have set out how, in the event of no deal, we would recognise the testing and safety approvals of existing medicines if they've been carried out by an EU Member State regulator,

To minimise any disruption to the supplies of medicines or medical devices from the EU.

These notices are proportionate.

They are measured.

And they prioritise stability for our citizens, businesses, public bodies and indeed for NGOs.

The 25 notices published in August were the first in a series of updates which we will be publishing over the coming weeks to keep stakeholders informed about what, if any, action they need to take.

Our approach acknowledges that there are some risks to a 'no deal' scenario,

And demonstrates that we are taking the action to avoid, to minimise and to mitigate these potential risks so we are equipped to manage any short-term disruption.

And while it is not what we want, a no deal scenario would bring some countervailing opportunities.

We would be able to lower tariffs and negotiate and bring into effect new free trade deals, straight away.

There would be the immediate recovery of full legislative and regulatory control, including over immigration policy,

And, whilst mindful of our legal obligations, a swifter end to our financial contributions to the EU.

Looking Ahead

So, Mr Speaker, I will continue to meet regularly with Michel Barnier,

Confident that a deal is within our grasp, and if the ambition and pragmatism that we have shown is matched by our EU friends.

But this House and the British people can rest assured, that the UK will be ready for Brexit – deal or no deal – and prepared, whatever the outcome, so this country will go from strength to strength.

And I commend this statement to the House.

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