

News story: Minister Field statement on terrorist attack in Kabul

This weekend's terrorist attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul was another tragedy for a country and people who continue to confront such threats with great resolve. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to all those killed and injured in the attack. I commend the valiant efforts of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces who worked day and night with great courage and skill to defeat the terrorists, and whose swift intervention certainly prevented greater casualties.

The UK will continue to work with allies and partners to help the Afghan government defeat terrorism and to support the development of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in dealing with this threat. We remain committed to helping the Afghan people achieve a peaceful and secure future. Terrorism will not succeed.

News story: People with hidden disabilities could enjoy new freedom with Blue Badge changes

People with hidden disabilities could soon have greater access to blue badges under new plans from Transport Minister Jesse Norman today (21 January 2018).

The proposals, which would herald the most significant changes since the blue badge was introduced in 1970, would help remove barriers to travel for people with conditions such as dementia and autism, allowing them better access to work, shops and amenities. This could also further help create parity between physical and mental health, and means everyone can take advantage of every opportunity.

Currently, about 2.4 million disabled people in England have a blue badge, allowing them to park on roads without charge and normally without time limit. Around 75% of blue badge holders say they would go out less often if they didn't have one.

Transport Minister Jesse Norman said:

Blue badges give people with disabilities the freedom to get jobs, see friends or go to the shops with as much ease as possible.

We want to try to extend this to people with invisible disabilities, so they can enjoy the freedom to get out and about, where and when they want.

The changes could also see a variety of healthcare professionals, who are better placed to identify if mental health causes mobility issues, carry out assessments to determine if a blue badge should be given.

Sarah Lambert, Head of Policy at the National Autistic Society, said:

The National Autistic Society welcomes this government proposal. It could mean that many more autistic people will qualify for a Blue Badge, which can be a lifeline.

There are an estimated 700,000 autistic people in the UK and whilst every person on the autism spectrum is different, for some, not being able to park in a predictable place close to a destination can cause a great deal of anxiety and put their safety at risk. Some autistic people can experience too much information from the environment around them on public transport, while other autistic people might not be aware of dangers on the road.

However, current Blue Badge rules mean that all-too-often autistic people don't qualify. The National Autistic Society has raised this issue with government over recent years and we are pleased to see they have listened to the concerns of autistic people and their families. We hope the government will make this important change and we look forward to working with them to make sure that autistic people and their families benefit.

[Blue Badge animation video](#)

Councils have different interpretations of the existing rules with some recognising hidden disabilities, but the changes proposed would give a clear and consistent guidelines for the whole of England.

The consultation will last 8 weeks.

[**Press release: Government launches new Office for Product Safety and Standards**](#)

The government has today (21 January 2018) announced the creation of a new

national oversight body tasked with identifying consumer risks and managing responses to large-scale product recalls and repairs.

The new Office for Product Safety and Standards will enable the UK to meet the evolving challenges of product safety by responding to expanding international trade, the growth in online shopping and the increasing rate of product innovation.

Today's announcement comes as part of the [government's response to the Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety](#). Established in October 2016 by former Consumer Minister Margot James, the group of product and fire safety experts was brought together to build on the recommendations made by Lynn Faulds Wood in her independent review into consumer product recalls.

In addition to providing support and advice for local authority Trading Standards teams, the office will co-ordinate work across local authorities where action is needed on a national scale and will ensure the UK continues to carry out appropriate border checks on imported products once the UK leaves the European Union.

Business Minister Andrew Griffiths said:

The new Office for Product Safety and Standards will strengthen the UK's already tough product safety regime and will allow consumers to continue to buy secure in the knowledge there is an effective system in place if products need to be repaired or replaced.

I thank the working group for their efforts to help improve product safety and I look forward to working with them in this new phase.

Neil Gibbins, Chair of the working group, said:

It has been my mission to make the public safe since I joined the fire service nearly 40 years ago. That's why I'm pleased to see the government respond to our recommendations with concrete steps to ensure the safety of consumers, now and in the future.

The government will continue to work with stakeholders such as consumer groups, manufacturers and retailers to ensure the office coordinates the UK's product safety regime as effectively as possible.

This will not lessen any of the legal responsibilities that sit with manufacturers, importers and retailers to present safe products to the market, and to take rapid effective action when safety issues arise with their products.

Other actions as part of the government's response to the working group include:

- working with the British Standards Institute to provide guidance on product recalls and corrective action
 - conducting research to help manufacturers and retailers develop technological solutions to product marking and identification
 - increasing the reach of Primary Authority to further share business, local authority and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) expertise to help protect consumers
 - researching consumer behaviour to identify the best way to drive up the number of consumers registering appliances with manufacturers
 - creating an expert panel to bring together trade associations, consumer and enforcement representatives to advise on product safety issues as they arise
1. The office will be based in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and will start work immediately.
 2. It will work closely with the BEIS Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor John Loughhead, to ensure it has access to cutting-edge scientific and technical expertise.
 3. The Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety was set up by former Consumer Minister Margot James to provide recommendations to improve the recalls process and the safety of consumer products. The group published its report in July 2017.
 4. The Office for Product Safety and Standards will cover general (non-food) consumer product safety. It will not cover vehicles, medicines and medical devices, or workplace equipment, which are already covered by other agencies. This remit is in line with the current responsibilities of BEIS on product safety.
 5. The remit of the office does not cover construction products, which are currently subject to a separate review being led by Dame Judith Hackitt. The government will carefully consider the recommendations of that review when it concludes.
 6. The Office for Product Safety and Standards will have a budget of around £12 million per year when fully operational.
 7. There are no changes to the roles and responsibilities of local authorities or other market surveillance authorities. The office will provide a number of specialist services centrally to support consistent national enforcement, including aspects of product testing and technical expertise.
 8. Primary Authority enables businesses to form a legal partnership with one local authority, which then provides assured and tailored advice on complying with environmental health, trading standards or fire safety regulations that other local regulators must respect.

[Speech: Supporting efforts for peace](#)

and security in Afghanistan

Thank you Mr President, I commend you for your leadership, foresight and diplomacy in convening this important and timely debate. And thank you to the Secretary General for your insightful briefing.

As many of you have said regional partnerships are crucial to achieving long term peace and security. This of course is particularly important when we consider the future prosperity of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is making genuine, sustainable progress in overcoming its many challenges. I saw this for myself when I visited Kabul only 3 months ago.

The international community has a crucial role to play in encouraging and promoting this progress, as do the regional partnerships and the initiatives that have been discussed here today. We warmly welcome the efforts underway to improve the links between Afghanistan and its regional partners in South and Central Asia. This, I believe, is critical to achieve greater economic development in Afghanistan, which of course is an essential factor for long-term stability.

Now such co-operation will bind common economic interests, reduce frictions and provide further avenues for resolving disputes. The CASA 1000 hydroelectric project is a great example of the benefits of this type of regional co-operation. Afghanistan and its neighbours have worked together and alongside the international community to overcome significant challenges, bringing this important endeavour to the point of implementation. We are confident that more, much more, regional co-operation will now follow. There is a clear appetite for it within some of the most important regional groups, such as the Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan, or RECCA, and the Heart of Asia. Today's meeting is, I believe, an important opportunity to demonstrate this Security Council's whole-hearted support for that type of co-operation.

However, Mr President, there is still a long way to go before Afghanistan's government and people achieve their goal of building a more stable and prosperous country. The United Kingdom will continue to play our part within the international community in supporting this goal. We have committed up to £750 million for the 4 years up to 2020 to help support the Afghan government's work to improve security, to reduce poverty, and to increase broad access to health and education. We are also working closely within NATO to support Afghanistan. Our non-combat troops have played a crucial role in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Through the National Army Officer Academy we have helped to train over 3000 cadets – these are Afghanistan's military leaders of the future.

But ultimately, as others have observed and will do of the course of this debate, the solution to long-term peace and stability lies not within the military, but in a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. That is why the forthcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Co-operation is so very important. We encourage all of Afghanistan's regional

partners to fully support these efforts towards peace. It takes vision, courage and leadership to begin a conversation with your adversary after years of violence and bloodshed.

However, the time is now surely ripe for that conversation. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace. So we urge President Ghani and the government to use the meeting to reach out to the insurgents and to try to launch a credible peace process. All of us here today should, collectively and individually, express our full support for this peace process, which is vital for Afghanistan's long-term stability.

Credible, inclusive and timely elections are also essential. We commend the work of various UN bodies in helping the government to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections this year and next.

Mr President, to conclude, Afghanistan continues to face a number of significant challenges in 2018, but this is also a year of real opportunity. With timely elections and the launch of a credible political and peace process this has the real potential to be the year that Afghanistan finally and irreversibly turns a corner. However as the US Deputy Secretary of State so rightly pointed out, the commitment to this must be conditions based and not driven by time lines. We need at times to be patient. This I think is in everyone's interests. Most of all, it will be in the interests of the Afghan people, who have waited so very long for peace. So let us all pledge today to do everything we can, within this Security Council and beyond, to support efforts to bring about that peace and stability.

Thank you.

[News story: New cyber lab classroom opens in Cumbria](#)

Apprentices viewing the new classroom for the first time.

The facility, based at the Energus building near Workington, Cumbria, has been specially designed to train the next generation of cyber experts.

Nine apprentices, who started their training in September last year, will now be able to use the classroom to learn the latest in cyber safety and IT. A second cohort of apprentices will use the classroom later this year.

The facility was funded by the NDA through its Cyber Security and Resilience Project. It forms part of an NDA cyber programme that is designed to grow capability and capacity for the NDA estate and its businesses.

NDA leaders said the new programme demonstrated long-term commitment from the NDA on cyber security and it is looking to invest £80 million over the next 5 years in cyber safety.

Rob Higgins, Business Services Director at the NDA, said:

Cyber security and resilience is vital to the operation of the NDA and its estate. The launch of the first NDA Cyber Lab classroom marks a clear focus on cyber safety and the NDA's commitment to this discipline. The knowledge and expertise of these home-grown apprentices will go a long way in helping to keep the NDA and its businesses safe from the growing cyber threat.

Scott Campbell, a Level 4 cyber security apprentice, said:

The classroom is way beyond my expectations and I feel privileged to be one of the first apprentices to use the facility.