

## **News story: UK-China Energy Dialogue**

The 5th annual UK-China Energy Dialogue took place in Beijing last week (Friday 15 December).

This year's Energy Dialogue demonstrated the continued importance of secure, affordable and sustainable energy in the golden era of UK-China relations, and both countries continued commitment to the Paris Agreement and efforts to decarbonise our economies.

Co-chaired by Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark and Nur Bekri, Vice Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission and Administrator of the National Energy Administration of China, the Dialogue saw the agreement of an Action Plan to implement the UK-China Clean Energy Partnership.

Agreed in 2015 as part of President Xi's State Visit to the UK, the UK and China's Clean Energy Partnership MoU is underpinned by an understanding from both governments that each country's significant experience and expertise has the potential to reduce the costs of energy, while promoting opportunities for economic growth, development of cheaper technologies, greater use of clean energy and trade in green goods

The Action Plan signals the next step in the UK-China energy relationship, by creating an agreement to facilitate extended, systematic and sustained collaboration on clean energy between both countries. It sets out future cooperation in priority areas including clean energy technologies, civil nuclear energy, power market reforms and third country activity including the Belt and Road Initiative.

Demonstrating the breadth of UK-China collaboration, the Action Plan will support further collaboration across research, development and deployment; commercialisation; policymaking and implementation; Industrial Strategy; and commercial partnerships. It will be underpinned by a forthcoming UK Energy and Low Carbon Prosperity Fund programme for China.

The Energy Dialogue was held alongside the 9th UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue co-chaired by Chancellor Philip Hammond and Chinese Vice Premier Ma Kai, providing an opportunity to highlight the links between economic growth and a clean energy transition.

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## **Speech: Immigration Minister: Scotland**

# should be proud of refugee support

It's a pleasure to be here with you all today. The past 2 years of resettlement in Scotland have been a wonderful journey and I'm so pleased to be able to share this celebration with you.

Scotland, along with the rest of the UK, should be proud of the way it has welcomed some of the world's most vulnerable refugees who have sought protection from conflict or persecution in their own countries. It was a real privilege to be able to meet some of these individuals earlier today and hear their stories.

Everyone in this room has played a part in making that happen, and it's with this in mind that I am pleased to have a chance to talk to you about 3 things today.

First, I want to thank you for your support for resettlement in Scotland.

Second, I will say a few words about resettlement across the UK.

And finally, I will touch on how I hope you can be part of the conversation as we consider our future plans for asylum and resettlement.

## **Resettlement in Scotland**

I am delighted with Scotland's achievements so far and your continued support for refugee resettlement. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Scottish local authorities, COSLA, the Scottish Government and all other partners in Scotland involved in supporting resettlement.

These families have been welcomed by communities in every part of Scotland. From Argyll and Bute to right here in Edinburgh, you have been providing refugees with a safe environment and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Resettlement in Scotland has been dependent on collaboration with partners from the beginning of the Scheme, and I am extremely grateful for the leadership and support that COSLA and the Scottish Government have provided so far. Across the UK, we have seen all parts of the community coming forward to resettle refugees.

## **UK resettlement**

The incredible support we have seen here for refugees from Syria is present across the UK. Since the scheme began, we have resettled over 9,300 individuals across 263 local authorities.

This is in addition to the thousands we grant protection to under normal asylum procedures and our other resettlement schemes. In the past year, we have also resettled over 400 at-risk children and their families through our Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme.

Thanks to you, these families receive a warm welcome as well as support to integrate into their new communities, including learning English and preparing for work and self-sufficiency. I ask you all to please continue your good work, as we are on track to meet our commitment to resettle 23,000 refugees by 2020.

## **Future of asylum and resettlement**

As 2020 draws nearer, we must now consider what the future of resettlement should be beyond our existing commitments.

Our ability to deliver resettlement depends on your continued support in offering and providing placements for these refugees. I know the challenges this can present, especially given that this is not the only scheme which requires the support and assistance of local authorities.

I am very grateful for the contribution that Glasgow has made to the asylum dispersal scheme, particularly given the increased pressures in recent years. I am keen for more local authorities in Scotland to participate in the scheme. I would encourage those of you not participating to do so; we stand ready to work with you to plan how you can participate.

You will also have seen the news that the National Transfer Scheme will be extended to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to allow the relevant authorities in each nation of the UK to participate and ensure it is a truly national scheme. I hope that I can count on your support for the scheme, helping unaccompanied children to get settled in the areas in which they are going to be looked after as soon as possible.

As we move forward, I want us to work together as we discuss what our next steps should be. Only by taking a collaborative approach will we be able to provide the best outcomes for resettled families and the local communities they are placed in.

I would like to finish by thanking you once again for all that you have done, and congratulating you on this milestone. I look forward to continuing to work with you to welcome and provide sanctuary to more vulnerable families.

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## **[Press release: Ministers take action to bolster PIP services](#)**

As part of its ongoing commitment to strengthen its services for disabled people, the government has accepted the recommendations of the second independent review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

The review, commissioned by the government and led by Paul Gray, was

published in March 2017. Action will be taken on the recommendations including simplifying communications for people claiming PIP, and exploring how to ensure evidence is collected and reviewed as effectively as possible to support people's claims.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Sarah Newton, said:

We're determined to make the PIP application process as simple as possible both for the independent assessors and the people applying for it. That's why we commissioned the second review on top of the strong steps we've already taken, so we can fully understand what works best, and what we need to improve on.

Working closely with disabled people and their representatives, we'll continue to explore how to help meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

PIP was introduced to replace the outdated Disability Living Allowance (DLA) system. At the core of PIP's design is the principle that awards should be made according to someone's overall level of need – taking into account both physical and non-physical conditions. Under PIP 29% of claimants are now receiving the highest rate of support, compared to 15% under DLA.

The first independent review was published in December 2014. Since then, significant improvements have been made to the PIP assessment process including:

- restructuring decision letters to make them easier to understand
- working with the Money Advice Service (MAS) to ensure PIP claimants can get bespoke budgeting advice if they need it
- introducing SMS messaging to keep a claimant informed throughout the journey of their claim
- introducing the Video Relay Service for claimants who use British Sign Language (BSL) so they are able to communicate with the department more easily
- introducing the Next Generation Text (NGT) for deaf or hard of hearing claimants unable to use BSL or those unable to speak
- amending the PIP (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2013 by removing the requirement for DLA claimants to wait a minimum of 28 days when they transfer to PIP if they became terminally ill

Assessment providers have also introduced Mental Health Champions, who are experienced professionals with direct and relevant work experience of helping people with mental health problems.

[PIP](#) is designed to help with the extra costs associated with a disability or health condition. It is not means tested and not linked to someone's ability to work.

Read the [government's response to the second independent review](#).

Read Paul Gray's [second independent review](#).

Media enquiries for this press release: 020 3267 5125

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## **News story: 200 suppliers now signing up to Contracts Finder every week**

The Contracts Finder platform now has more than 22,000 registered suppliers, with almost two-thirds of them small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – a 53% increase since the beginning of this year. Around 200 suppliers sign up to use the platform every week.

The site now regularly features more contract notices than TED, the EU procurement portal.

Contracts Finder is managed by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), as part of the Cabinet Office, with the aim of increasing procurement transparency and providing more opportunities for SMEs to supply goods and services to the public sector.

Automatic email alerts are distributed to interested suppliers, with suppliers able to tailor their searches to deliver news about opportunities in their own specialism.

Caroline Nokes, Minister for government Resilience and Efficiency, says:

Contracts Finder is a great way for small and medium sized businesses to search for opportunities in central government and the wider public sector. Smaller businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, and I am keen that they are able to access as many opportunities as possible, helping the Government to achieve our aspiration of spending £1 in every £3 with SMEs by 2022.

Ian Fishwick, Chief Executive of Adept Telecom, Commercial Director for Innopsis, and member of the Cabinet Office SME Panel, says:

Almost all public sector buyers are now registered to use the service including councils, emergency services, central government, universities and the NHS. We are closer than ever to having a single website where you can find the bulk of public sector tenders.

Emma Jones, Small Business Crown Representative, says:

Contracts Finder is the go-to place for SMEs to find government and public sector opportunities. More and more organisations are using it with twice as many UK opportunities published when compared with the TED website. I'd urge SMEs to log on for free and find out what opportunities are out there. We'd like to see the platform go even further and become the single location on which government's major suppliers also list their opportunities, whilst making performance data on existing contracts more transparent.

Contracts Finder supports the UK Government's commitment to the Open Data Contracting Standard (ODCS), ensuring that all stages of the public procurement process are open and transparent.

The UK is the first G7 country to implement the ODCS for contracts administered by a central purchasing authority – CCS.

This means that the whole process of awarding public sector contracts is visible to the public for the first time. Data and documents are disclosed at all stages of the contracting process. This allows deeper analysis of contracting data by a wide range of users.

The government is currently exploring measures to further increase business with SMEs, including by asking larger suppliers to advertise subcontracting opportunities through Contracts Finder.

For more information on Contracts Finder and to sign up to alerts, visit <https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>

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## **[News story: Twenty three universities join student visa pilot](#)**

A pilot which is looking at streamlining the process for international Masters students wanting to study in the UK has been extended to an additional 23 universities, the Immigration Minister announced today.

Currently in its 2nd year with the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bath and Imperial College London, the pilot will streamline the process for international students looking to study on a Masters course of 13 months or less in the UK.

It also provides greater support for students who wish to switch to a work visa and take up a graduate role, by allowing them to remain in the UK for 6 months after they have finished their course.

## Responsibility

Universities taking part are given responsibility for eligibility checks, meaning that students can submit fewer documents than required in the current process alongside their visa applications.

Applicants that do not meet immigration rules will be refused. All students will continue to require Home Office security and identity checks.

The additional 23 universities to benefit from the pilot include 2 in Scotland, 2 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland as well as universities from across England.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

I am delighted to announce the expansion of this pilot which is part of our ongoing activity to ensure that our world-leading institutions remain highly competitive.

The UK continues to be the 2nd most popular destination for international students and the number coming to study at our universities has increased by 24% since 2010.

This is a clear indication that genuine students are welcome and there is no limit on the number who can come to study in the UK.

## Increase

The most recent Home Office statistics show that the number of students applying for visas increased by 8% over the past year, and there has been a 9% increase in the number of students applying to Russell Group universities.

The 23 additional universities will be able to apply the pilot to their 2018/19 intake. The universities were selected as their visa refusal rates are consistently the lowest in their area or region.

The 23 universities to be added to the pilot are:

- Cardiff University
- Goldsmiths University of London
- Harper Adams University
- Newcastle University
- Queen's University Belfast
- The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- University of Bristol
- Durham University
- University of East Anglia
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Essex
- University of Exeter

- University of Glasgow
- University of Leicester
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University of Wales Trinity St. David (Swansea Campus)
- University of Warwick
- University of York