

News story: PM's call with Prime Minister Gentiloni: 17 Oct 2017

A Downing Street spokesperson said

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Gentiloni of Italy ahead of Thursday's European Council.

Prime Minister Gentiloni expressed his appreciation for the choice of Florence for the Prime Minister's speech and the spirit in which it was conducted.

Both agreed on the importance of continued constructive progress in the UK's exit negotiations and expressed a desire to provide reassurance on citizens' rights as early as possible.

Speech: How team with cardboard boxes for desks saved taxpayer £60 million

Just over five years ago, a group of people using cardboard boxes for desks came together in an office in Waterloo. Their central idea was that citizens shouldn't need to understand the structure of government to interact with it. Their mission was to turn 1,884 separate websites into a single site for government.

Five years on, that single government website, [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), has been visited 4 billion times: more than 3 million times every day. Delivered by the [Government Digital Service](https://www.gov.uk/government/departments/government-digital-service)(GDS), it has become a part of our national infrastructure. It has won design awards and is recognised as a world leader in public sector digital innovation.

Government should help not hinder citizens and by putting users first and simplifying tasks which before took days and many pages of form filling, it has done just that.

For example, the Carer's Allowance digital service removed 170 questions from the application process. It saved precious time for those who spend their lives caring for others.

It is now possible to register to vote online, renew your passport online and, if, in the course of your life you wish to import a ferret, GOV.UK has made it easier than ever to find out how.

As encouraging as big numbers and awards are, they are not the motivation, nor were they when the government brought together that group of people in Waterloo. Transforming services has always been about making a difference to people's lives. By doing this, it creates a government that is more open, adaptable and responsive. One which is inclusive and puts the user first.

The creation of GOV.UK remains good for government and good for the people it serves. It brought departments and agencies together. It has saved the taxpayer over £60 million. People visit GOV.UK to access services and information which affect their families, homes and jobs. Its importance cannot be overstated. GOV.UK is where government communicates what it is doing, thinking and how it is working.

For instance last week we launched the ethnicity facts and figures service. As the prime minister said on its launch: "By bringing this information together in one place for the first time it will shine a light on the issues we are facing."

This is the whole point of GOV.UK: bringing everything together in one place and making it as easy as possible for people to find, understand and use it.

For me, one of the best features isn't anything that has been built: it's the commitment to continuous improvement. GOV.UK is not finished now, and it never will be: it will always be a work in progress, adapting and improving all the time.

As we look to the future, we see that websites are just one way of accessing content and services over the internet. Technologies such as Alexa and Siri are good examples of this. Work is under way at GOV.UK to prepare content so that it can adapt to meet just this sort of technological change.

I'm excited at the work the GDS is doing to lead and enable departments to play their role in realising the possibilities that the internet and digital advances offer. GOV.UK is part of the transformation of public services designed to meet the needs of today and equip us for the technological changes of tomorrow.

Those who have brought us to this point have my thanks and congratulations. The work they have done has redefined how a modern government should serve its people.

I know that the work on digital government is never finished. GOV.UK and the Government Digital Service have vital work to do to ensure that as technology moves forward, the government fulfils our duty and keeps pace. I hope the cake and balloons are ready as you celebrate your fifth birthday today, and I send my very best wishes.

[News story: F-35 jet and new batch of UK pilots cleared for Carrier take-off, Defence Minister tells Select Committee](#)

A new group of UK pilots are trained and ready to fly the UK's cutting-edge F-35 fighter jet which is now cleared for take-off from HMS Queen Elizabeth following successful trials using the ski-ramp design featured on the UK flagship, Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin announced at the House of Commons Defence Select Committee this afternoon.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin said:

With a new team of British pilots completing their training and the F-35 cleared to fly from the carrier, the momentum continues for this game-changing jet. These milestones come as our pilots prepare to return from the States, ready for next year's unforgettable flight trials from the deck of the nation's new flagship.

The UK currently has 12 F-35 jets out in the United States where they are being tested ahead of flight trials from the Royal Navy's 65,000 tonne carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, next year. Two more aircraft are set to be delivered by the end of the year.

The UK's F-35s have been successfully tested on the ski ramp design at Pax Rivers, Maryland, in the US.

The Defence Minister announced that the F-35 Integrated Test Force, which includes five British pilots, has now successfully completed ski ramp trials. That milestone clears the aircraft for take-off from the deck of the Carrier.

Speaking about the jet, Squadron Leader Andy Edgell, part of that Integrated Test Force, said:

She's marvellous. She has an incredible amount of thrust but it's more than just brawn that makes her so fantastic to fly – it's the brains behind her as well.

She's a masterful piece of engineering and it makes her so effortless to fly. It's impossible not to be exhilarated every time. She's a beast when you want her to be and tame when you need her to be. She's beautiful.

The launch of the F35s from the HMS Queen Elizabeth is a once in a generation historical event. To be the first to fly off the carrier, to have a front row seat, would be an absolute privilege. It wouldn't just be about the pilot – there are hundreds of people who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to make this happen and the honour will be theirs too.

There are already 150 UK personnel out in the US working with the state-of-the-art jets, and the latest course of UK pilots have just finished their ground school training and are now ready to fly the F-35B at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort in South Carolina.

The cutting-edge F-35 fighter jet.

Amongst those to have graduated from that course are four pilots who started F-35 training straight from their advanced pilot training at RAF Valley, and Wing Commander John Butcher, who will be the Commanding Officer of the RAF's new 617 squadron.

The new home of 617 squadron, RAF Marham, continues to build towards the arrival of the jets next year, moving a step closer earlier this month when the runway intersection resurfacing was completed. 617 Squadron will be the first operational British F-35 unit.

And elsewhere, the Defence Minister also announced that last week, the first F-35 flight with the latest software was conducted on one of the UK's F-35Bs at Edwards Air Force Base in California. This software upgrade, technically known as Block 3F, represents the full warfighting capability the UK F-35s will have at Initial Operating Capability in December 2018.

UK industry will provide approximately 15% of the value of each F-35 to be built, more than 3,000, worth some £1 billion and generating around 25,000 British jobs. The programme remains on time, within costs and offers the best capability for our Armed Forces.

Find out about about the fifth generation F-35B Lightning and the important work of the Integrated Test Force [here](#).

[Press release: PM call with Prime Minister Rajoy: 17 Oct 2017](#)

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Rajoy of Spain. The Prime Minister expressed her condolences over the loss of life and the damage caused by the forest fires in northern Spain.

The two leaders discussed the ongoing situation in Catalonia. The Prime Minister reiterated that the UK is clear that the referendum had no legal basis and that any unilateral declaration of independence would be inconsistent with the rule of law. She added that the UK would not recognise any such declaration of independence by Catalonia.

On Brexit, the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Rajoy discussed progress in the negotiations and looked ahead to meeting at this week's European Council.

Press release: PM hosts meeting with housebuilders: 17 October 2017

Today the Prime Minister met representatives of large and small housing developers, housing associations and local government to discuss achieving a step change in the delivery of new homes.

At the meeting, the Prime Minister emphasised the government's ambition to tackle one of the biggest challenges facing our country today – fixing the broken housing market. For too many people, home ownership has moved increasingly out of reach, and people are finding themselves spending longer in insecure private rented accommodation that is becoming ever more expensive.

The Prime Minister outlined her plans to increase housing supply which means developers, big and small, local authorities and housing associations all stepping up to play their part.

Other issues discussed included making the most of modern methods of construction, having the skilled workers we need, helping small and medium sized enterprises grow and making sure planning permissions granted by councils were delivered into new homes.

Those in attendance also had an opportunity to set out their ideas and commitments, as well as the actions needed to remove the barriers they were facing in building new homes.

They also discussed some of the recent measures taken by government including enabling 130,000 more families to get on the housing ladder through the £10 billion Help to Buy scheme and an additional £2 billion for affordable housing.

It was a positive and collaborative meeting which needs to signal a step change in house building if we are to build a country that truly works for everyone.