

Speech: Greg Clark speech to the British Chambers of Commerce

Introduction

Thank you – it's a great honour to speak to you today.

William Beveridge once wrote about the strength of our civic institutions.

He described it as the “distinguishing mark of a free society” and an “outstanding feature of British life”.

This country's rich array of business organisations is very much part of that tradition and that is something that Adam (Adam Marshall, BCC Director General) has been talking about.

As you will know, having met so many of you in all areas of the country, you are the leaders of your community as well as the prominent people in business.

For too long there has been a distinction drawn that is not the reality in all the towns, cities and areas that you are in.

You have a great opportunity to reassert your historic role as a civic institution of leadership in our country, of particular importance at this time for reasons I'll come onto shortly.

Your network of chambers creates a presence and creates advocates around the world.

Your unique network of chambers is a powerful means of not only promoting business, but the other way of making sure policy makers have their finger on the pulse of the concerns and the priorities and intricacies, not just around this country but around the world.

And through the BCC, your voice is heard loud and clear in Government.

Adam (Adam Marshall, BCC Director General) and I meet very regularly, we sit down most weeks together in my office and have a very candid conversation about all of the things on your mind that Adam and his team know from his conversations with you and the surveys you do and it is incredibly useful for me to have that direct connection to you.

But of course as you know, and as you've seen, there is no substitute for getting out and talking to people in these places and in your hometowns and cities.

And I was just looking through the list of Chambers while looking at the programme for today. It isn't quite an A to Z, but rather an A to W I think I'm right in saying – ranging from Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce

to the Wirral Chamber of Commerce.

As it happens, it was the Aberdeen Chamber that kindly hosted one of my first ministerial visits in the summer as Secretary of State and I was grateful for the roundtable that was arranged there.

Building on local strengths

Every time I visit a Chamber it reminds me of the fact that the UK economy is literally nothing without its local economies.

And therefore it seems to me that the diversity of our communities, their challenges and their opportunities, should mean everything to economic policy.

No one who has actually been to Aberdeen and the Wirral, could mistake one for the other.

And, nor should they imagine that the same set of measures could be relevant the business and industries uniformly of both.

And the same applies of course to Cornwall and Cambridge, Northamptonshire and Northern Ireland.

The difference is that across our United Kingdom, from Suffolk to South Yorkshire. each is as economically distinct as it is socially, environmentally and architecturally.

So as I go on to say something about our Industrial Strategy, I want to emphasise from the beginning that what I don't have in mind is a monolithic plan composed of identical policies implemented by the same people in every part of the country uniformly.

Rather it seems that our approach needs to take inspiration from your approach.

The BCC is composed of local Chambers, each with their own identity and leadership as I discovered and I know that Adam knows from his travels round the country, and I'm sure you emphasise your unique circumstances every time you get together and you communicate what's happening in your area.

It seems to me that in a similar way, our Industrial Strategy should be composed of local industrial strategies in which local business leadership has a bigger say as central government.

Now, few countries pack in as much diversity across a few hundred miles as ours does.

In our component nations, cities, shires, towns and villages, the sheer richness of our culture, our history, our architecture and our landscape is unsurpassed.

And yet each part of this country, though wonderfully distinctive, is no more

than a few hours away from any other part.

Britain as a whole offers both variety and connection – and, therefore, huge potential for innovation and prosperity.

So I think it is therefore a tragedy that we became one of the most centralised countries in the western world – one of the great wrong turns in our national history.

A country that was founded on insurgent towns and cities led by, very often, local industrialists and local business leaders.

Over a period of over a hundred years we saw power seep away from the great centres of our country to Westminster and Whitehall.

And during my research I came across documents from the middle of the 20th century, the earliest heyday of central planning, in which Britain beyond the Home Counties was referred to as “Outer Britain” – which tells you everything you need to know about the mind-set and mentality of the time.

Of course, attitudes have since changed considerably, but not before doing a great deal of damage.

British productivity, on average, lags behind most of our competitors.

That’s not because we lack for world-class companies, big or small, across a range of industrial sectors.

At its best, British business is unbeatable.

Yet, economics is not like the Olympics – it’s not just about the medal-winning positions that count, but the performance of the whole team.

And that’s one of the challenges that we have because the British economy is distorted by some unusually wide disparities in productivity compared to our competitors.

Much of that unevenness is geographical.

This country has the richest area in northern Europe, but also nine of the ten poorest.

And we’re not talking about remote places, as I said earlier, beyond hope of development.

They are vital parts of the country, many of them close to our great cities – which ought to be powerhouses of productivity.

You just need to look at our competitors to see that this can be done. Look across the channel to France and to Germany, take the biggest cities outside of the capital, seven of the eight have productivity per capita that is above the national average, dragging that national average up.

Whereas in England it is the other way round, only one of the eight biggest

English cities outside of London, Bristol as it happens, over performs the national average.

And if France and Germany, and Italy for that matter, can have strong regional centres in productivity driving forward the national economy, many of which are not with dissimilar industrial heritages to us, then there is no reason why we can't be more steadily prosperous in every part of this country.

I'm convinced it's one of the big imperatives of our Industrial Strategy to make sure that every part of the country is firing on all cylinders. Not just the cities themselves, but the surrounding towns and the countryside.

This is one of the initiatives of the Chambers of Commerce. You exist to bring people together and gather the local strengths and to turn those local strengths into national strengths.

This is exactly the path we need to take as we plan our industrial future.

The good news is that change is not only possible, it is already underway.

Actually a prime example is London itself.

Did you know, for most of the 20th century, our capital city, where we sit today, also underperformed the national average – but in the last few decades it has achieved a remarkable turnaround.

There was a time when London was thought to be in decline and its economic prominence was declining.

That was turned around and Bristol followed suit – and now we see real progress being made in all areas of the country – including cities in the Midlands and the North.

For instance, before 2010 there was only one private sector job created in the North for every ten created in the South.

But since 2010, that gap – more of a chasm actually – has almost disappeared.

In fact, cities like Birmingham and Manchester, with representatives sitting here today, are now among the top job creating areas in the country.

Obviously, that's a tribute to the effort and enterprise of the businesses represented here today and by colleagues back at home.

There's no surprise that 2010 was the turning point – because that's when I think there was a recognition, crossing all parties, that we need to turn back the process of centralising power in Westminster and Whitehall and start to devolve real decision making and economic power to local communities.

A different policy is producing a different result which in my view should encourage us to push further and faster in this new direction.

Industrial Strategy

When Theresa May became Prime Minister she declared her intention to build an economy that works for everyone.

And that means that businesses in every part of the country must be helped to achieve their full potential.

And Government does have a role to play in that, an enabling role that includes public investment in areas like science, innovation and skills which I know right across the country is one of the challenges we face to fulfil.

There is, however, no doubt that over the decades some parts of the country have been better served than others.

Putting this right means addressing questions of the leadership and the institutions that we have working.

As part of this we announced the biggest increase in public funding for research and development since 1979.

Vitality that includes investment in both the R for research and the D for development – because the development of research to create commercial opportunity, translating our brilliant scientific ideas into opportunities for manufacturers and other suppliers I think is one of the great chances we have in this country

And so using our resources effectively to find out what is needed and what capabilities there are, not just in London and the South East, but in every part of the country to benefit.

It requires, I think, an attitude on the part of the Government that looks to empower and looks to bring into the conversation the business legion in every part of the country.

So as we develop a modern Industrial Strategy, it's vital that coordination in producing a strategy as a government should never be confused with centralisation.

Of course, some decisions can only be made centrally – for instance in regard to nationally important infrastructure like hub airport capacity.

But most decisions should be made on the basis of local knowledge and practical experience of businesses and the community.

In other words, Government needs be aware of when others know best.

Government is good at some things, but not everything.

The success of the Industrial Strategy will depend on us knowing the difference.

But this begs a question:

If Government does step back, who takes over?

The obvious answer, to everyone in this room, is that it is the people who know better – the business leaders, community leaders and the people who live and work and do business in their local communities.

But that requires strong local institutions – so that decisions are made at the right local and geographical scale and for the common good, not special interests.

Since 2010, we've been building those institutions.

For instance, the Local Enterprise Partnerships to which many Chambers of Commerce have made such a valuable contribution.

Then there are new local government institutions like the Combined Authorities and elected mayors in metropolitan areas. They all have very strong business involvement.

If these were just talking shops then they wouldn't really matter.

But through the City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Deals is a significant transfer of power and resources that is moving away from Whitehall.

And I want to see the Industrial Strategy developed and implemented in the same way – as a genuinely devolved policy in which Whitehall is a partner not the boss.

This will require institutions, local institutions and sometimes sectorial institutions – so that investments can be coordinated across industrial sectors as well as geographical areas.

There are some excellent examples of this approach already in action – for instance in the automotive sector, where bodies like the Automotive Council and the Advanced Propulsion Centre play a vital role in channelling public and private investment for the good of the whole sector.

Much of the strength of a business comes from within – from the dedication of its management and workers, the soundness of its business model and the quality and originality of its products.

These things are ultimately up to you as individual enterprises.

But some of your strength comes from without – from the strength and depth of the markets and supply chains you depend on.

Now these are things that you can't do as much about as the decisions within your own companies, at least you can't on your own.

But this gathering today, and your Chambers across the country, are an outstanding answer to the challenge of how you can make use of the connections that you have as a local business to improve the environment

generally for business and prosperity.

When companies cooperate, there's a great deal that local economies and industrial sectors can achieve together through shared institutions.

Sector deals

So that is why as well continuing this agenda of strong devolution and decision making, especially around things like infrastructure and skills, I have invited British business to come forward with sectoral deals to advance the productivity of particular sectors.

The idea is that sectors show how they can work together to improve prospects in the productivity and competitiveness of that sector.

We'll then sit down with you and hammer out a deal.

There is of course a big overlap between the sectoral and the local approaches to industrial policy.

Companies in the same sector are often concentrated in particular parts of the country.

I mentioned my first Chamber visit was to Aberdeen and they really conveyed the importance of the oil and gas industry and how it was absolutely vital to that economy and to businesses there.

I know talking to the ceramics industry, I think Sara Williams may be here in the audience, that the work the Chamber does in Staffordshire with the ceramics industry is bringing together the local knowledge and depth of experience to make sure that sector and place come together.

In Somerset Dale Edwards and I spent some time together in recent months making sure that the opportunities for the nuclear sector and at Hinkley Point C galvanizes the local economy and businesses across the area benefit from it.

So already we see, without any nudge or prompt from me, real activism in sectors and places coming together. I think this Chamber model, this collaboration between sectors and place; I'd like to see as a motif of our Industrial Strategy.

I fully recognises the importance of these geographical clusters and will ensure that the sectoral and the local approaches go hand in hand.

So I want to issue an invitation to you through Adam and to Chambers across the country to participate in the development of these sectoral deals, as well as the local arrangements that we have.

We want you to advise us on how we get everybody pointing in the same direction and making sure we've got the right institutions, the right skills, the right trade, the right colleges and the right research and development institutions.

Your local knowledge is something that is irreplaceable, it is absolutely essential that this is put to work to ensure every part of the country prospers.

Later this year we will be unveiling a formal framework for the negotiation of sector deals.

But I can announce today that the Chambers of Commerce will be invited to be an integral part of that framework – and the deals that emerge from it.

Getting involved

As we are thinking about an Industrial Strategy, my view is that there is no such thing as a short-term strategy. It is a contradiction in terms, who ever heard of a long term strategy.

And so when we are going through a time of uncertainty, I think that is the time where you should look to the long term and work together to be able to put in place the policies and institutions and relationships that can endure beyond the next few weeks, months and years.

This should be a force of stability and confidence. Something that we shape together and we can rely on together so that businesses and industry can make investment decisions knowing that the framework that has been adopted that represents the whole view between businesses and Government in every part of the country.

I want you to be part of this. If something is to be for the long term it has to endure and if it is going to endure that means it has to be done collaboratively.

That means, given the local knowledge that is unique to you and your colleagues in every part of the country, it is absolutely vital that you are part, not just of the consultation, but of the delivery of our Industrial Strategy.

I, working closely with Adam and colleagues, will absolutely ensure the recommendations in response to the consultation that he makes on behalf of the Chambers of Commerce will come direct to me and be highly influential.

But more than that, as I set out, I want you to be part of the delivery of our Industrial Strategy in every part of the country so that we can do what our competitors have done to make sure that we are firing on all cylinders and make sure that every part of the country can contribute to our national prosperity.

An economy that works for everyone is one in which there is business confidence and business planning for the future.

There is more to our economic lives than economic efficiency alone, vital though it is.

There are commercial values and also civic values. Through your work in your

businesses in your Chambers, you put forward not just the interest of your businesses, but you also put into practice the interests of your local economies and accumulatively through that, the national economy.

Your involvement is something I hope and count on. I look forward to developing our relationship with those Chambers that I haven't visited so far, I can go there and get to know all your challenges and solutions that you might have to offer to our shared future.

[Official Statistics: Woodfuel demand and usage in Scotland 2016](#)

This report provides data on existing and potential woodfuel use in Scotland and covers the year 2015. It also assesses the possible additional use of woodfuel in the next few years.

[Speech: Karen Bradley's UK Digital Strategy Speech](#)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Alice [Bentinck, CEO of Entrepreneur First].

I am delighted to be here today to launch the Government's [Digital Strategy](#). We have taken our time getting it absolutely right, but it has been time well spent!

Digital technology is revolutionising all aspects of our lives, whether healthcare, transport, manufacturing, entertainment, or our connections with family and friends.

It is going to lead to the creation of industries that do not currently exist – and of which few of us can conceive. But all industries, all businesses, all consumers will benefit from the use of digital technology.

The UK is in a position of real strength.

We have fantastic innovators.

Our universities and research centres are helping to lead the way.

The vibrancy of the digital economy across all the regions of the UK is laid out in Tech City UK's excellent annual Tech Nation report. I look forward to reading the 2017 report later this month.

In this job, I have been lucky enough to see cutting-edge digital work being done throughout the United Kingdom – in cloud computing, virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, cyber security, and FinTech.

The digital sector is worth 7 per cent of our economy. And grew nearly three times faster than the rest of it in 2015.

But that does not mean that we can stand still.

And just keeping up should not be the limit of our ambitions.

The UK must lead the world. Meanwhile, none of our citizens should be left behind.

This strategy will ensure that the benefits of digital are spread throughout the country; that we have the necessary infrastructure; that regulations are agile and benign; and that everyone has the skills they need to be citizens in the digital age and workers in the digital economy.

The Government's new Industrial Strategy will create an economy that works for everyone. It backs business, builds on strengths, and tackles weaknesses.

The Digital Strategy is based on the same principles. But, vitally, not only is digital a key sector in its own right, it is central to the success of all other sectors – and central to all our personal lives.

Because it reaches across so much of society, this Digital Strategy is part of implementing our Plan for Britain – a plan to build a stronger, fairer country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few, where wealth and opportunity are spread throughout the country. Make no mistake – digital technology will be a major factor in accomplishing this.

The Digital Strategy will help to create a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone.

It will require a big effort. And just as the prize for success is enormous, so too would be the price of failure.

Simply put, our economy, public services, and country will not be fit for purpose unless we have fully embraced digital technology.

So let me take you through our vision, and how – working together with the sector – we will achieve it

The Digital Strategy has seven strands:

Connectivity;

Digital skills and inclusion;

Making the UK the best place to start and grow a digital business;

Making all British businesses digital;

A safe and secure cyberspace;

Transforming government to make it more digital; and

Making the most out of data.

1. Digital connectivity

First and foremost, being a digital leader depends on being connected.

Digital connectivity was once a nice-to-have. It is now essential. This means that government has a responsibility to create the framework and conditions for investment in the right infrastructure throughout the UK.

We have already made great progress.

Nine out of 10 premises now have access to superfast broadband, and the Government's rollout programme has been connecting 3,000 homes a day.

99 per cent of UK premises now have indoor mobile voice coverage – and as a result of our licence agreements with phone companies, 4G geographic coverage has increased substantially over the past year, from 48 per cent to 72 per cent.

That is no reason to become complacent or to stand still.

So while we will continue our work to complete the roll-out of 4G and superfast broadband, we are also introducing a Universal Service Obligation – giving every business, public premises, and individual in the country the right to request an affordable high speed broadband connection.

Moreover, we will seize the opportunities promised by the broadband and mobile networks of the future. We will invest £1 billion in a programme to explore and encourage next generation digital infrastructure, including full fibre and 5G.

And because consumers must be able to find the best deal and know what they're getting, we will make sure that broadband adverts accurately reflect reality.

But I also recognise that connectivity isn't just about statistics. It needs to reflect how people now live their lives. That is why, for example, we will roll out free wifi on trains and in more public places, and improve mobile coverage on our road network.

2. Digital skills

But connectivity is of no use if people do not have the skills to benefit from it.

That is why we have committed to help every adult in the UK who lacks core digital skills to access free training. Digital skills now merit being placed on the same footing as literacy and numeracy.

We are committed to closing the digital skills gap, giving everyone the knowledge and confidence to prosper in the modern economy.

And we want to work with others who feel the same way. So we will establish a new Digital Skills Partnership, bringing together technology companies, local businesses, local government, and voluntary organisations – to make sure that people have the right skills for the jobs in their area.

I am delighted to announce that as part of this, we already have a commitment that more than four million free digital skills training opportunities will be created.

I am very grateful to all the companies that have already stepped forward.

Lloyds Banking Group will give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, charities, and small and medium-sized businesses by 2020; Barclays plan to teach basic coding to 45,000 more children and assist up to one million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness; Google, as part of their commitment to five hours of free digital skills for everyone, has pledged to help boost digital skills in seaside towns.

The Digital Skills Partnership will help people find the training they need and identify digital job vacancies for them.

This local expertise is crucial, because local needs will differ. One area may have a lot of expertise in data analytics but need different digital skills, for example.

We will also equip the next generation.

Coding is being put in the National Curriculum – and we are taking forward the recommendations of the Shadbolt Review into computer science degrees – so that younger and future generations will have the specialist skills they need to take full advantage of digital.

As part of the effort to encourage young people from a wider range of backgrounds to consider a tech career, we will support the National Citizen Service in piloting new ways to include digital skills and careers in NCS programmes.

We will also run a national after-school programme for the most talented students, cyber apprenticeships, and adult retraining – so that the UK has the pipeline of cyber security skills that it needs.

And I can assure you that the Government is well aware of the importance that industry places on an immigration policy which enables you to hire the best talent – both now and after Brexit.

Last month's immigration statistics show that more than 30,000 Tier 2 workers

were sponsored in the Information and Communication sector.

Take-up of the Tech Nation Visa Scheme continues to rise. Government has agreed a temporary increase to meet demand for this year, demonstrating our commitment to attracting the brightest and best to come and work in the UK.

We also recognise that digital businesses are concerned about the future status of their current staff who are EU nationals. Securing the status of, and providing certainty to, EU nationals already in the UK and to UK nationals in the EU is one of this Government's early priorities for the forthcoming negotiations.

3. Making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business

Connectivity and skills are vital to our ambition of making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business.

The UK has always been a highly innovative country. It has a long record in building and using cutting-edge technology. Our start-ups are among the best in the world, and we have some of the strongest technology clusters. Our fusion of digital and creative expertise gives us a unique edge.

This is a perfect example of why the Industrial Strategy is absolutely right to identify what the UK is strong at and the Government is right to be determined that this success should be spread throughout the country.

Let's be clear: the digital economy is not confined to London.

Tech City UK's Tech North programme is spurring the development of the tech ecosystem around Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Sunderland.

We have a thriving FinTech sector in Edinburgh, leading video games developers in Dundee, tech clusters in Cardiff and Swansea, and cyber security expertise in Belfast.

A variety of Government programmes are already lending support – and we will build on this to back talent and innovation wherever we find it.

To create the right conditions for growth, we will work with independent regulators so we have the right rules in place to build a world-leading framework for digital.

Being the best country in the world to start and grow a digital business also relies on extensive research and development.

In last year's Autumn Statement, the Government announced that we would invest an additional £4.7 billion – so that British business will remain at the cutting edge of scientific and technological discovery. This was the biggest increase in public R&D investment of any parliament since 1979.

The Government has announced a number of steps to help businesses to secure the finance they need to grow throughout their life.

We also want to support emerging technologies, capitalising on strengths such as robotics, clean energy, biotechnology, and FinTech.

The UK is the global capital for financial technology, which generated £6.6 billion in revenue in 2015. So I can announce that we will launch a new competition to harness the power of FinTech for people who struggle to manage their money.

The UK is also at the forefront of the Artificial Intelligence revolution, so we are appointing leading academic Professor Wendy Hall from academia and Jerome Pesenti from Benevolent AI to undertake a review of how we can create the conditions for the AI industry to thrive and grow here. Jerome will be speaking later on, and will I'm sure have more to say on the subject!

And £17 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council will boost the development of new Robotics and Artificial Intelligence technologies in UK universities.

This will support pioneering research, including a project by the University of Manchester to develop robots capable of operating autonomously and effectively within hazardous environments like nuclear facilities, while researchers at Imperial College London will be able to make major advances in surgical micro-robotics.

We will also establish a network of UK Tech Hubs in developing countries. These hubs will work alongside the key existing hub in Israel, boosting our impact in emerging digital economies around the world, and providing jobs and trading opportunities for British firms.

4. Helping all British businesses to embrace digital

With connectivity, skills and the right backing in place, we want to help all British businesses to embrace digital.

This is a huge prize – and I want all UK companies businesses to share in it.

There are four core digital activities that most businesses need to be competitive: a web presence; an e-commerce capability; working in a cloud-based computing environment; and digitising back-office functions such as payroll.

Small and medium-sized enterprises with a strong web presence grow on average more than twice as quickly as those with minimal or no presence, export twice as much, and create twice as many jobs. Businesses that use data to help automate functions and inform decisions are around 10 per cent more productive.

Although overall UK companies have similar levels of Internet access and web

presence as those in other European countries, they are less likely to digitise their back-office functions. Changing this and embracing other digital ways of working could play a crucial role in closing the UK's productivity gap with other G7 countries.

To help this, we are investing £13 million in seed funding for the creation of a private sector-led Productivity Council.

We will also encourage the use of digital technology to help 100,000 more UK businesses export by 2020. We want the UK to be the place to be for digital and to export our expertise and products.

As we encourage businesses to embrace digital, we also want to see a more diverse workforce. Just 17 per cent of people who work in the tech sector and only 9.5 per cent of students taking computer science A-level courses are women. We cannot expect to lead the world if we largely ignore half the working population.

We have wonderful role models like Alice, and there are a number of programmes doing valuable work. They include the CyberFirst Girls competition, run by GCHQ to encourage young girls to consider a career in cyber security; the TechFuture Girls programme, an after-school club designed to encourage girls to stay engaged in IT; and the SheMeansBusiness Partnership, run by Facebook and Enterprise Nation to deliver training to more than 10,000 women across the UK.

The Government will play its part, including by supporting further development of the Tech Talent Charter, which outlines key measures that encourage organisations to think differently in support of a workforce drawn from all sections of society.

5. Making the UK the safest place in the world to be online

These ingredients for a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone must be underpinned by a safe and secure cyberspace.

As our reliance on technology grows, so do the opportunities for those who want to compromise our systems and data.

A quarter of all businesses experienced a cyber attack or breach in the past year – and two-thirds of large businesses were victims.

That is why we have an ambitious, new five-year strategy, backed by £1.9 billion of investment.

The National Cyber Security Centre will manage national incidents, provide an authoritative voice and centre of expertise, and deliver support and advice to government departments, devolved administrations, regulators, and businesses.

And we will step up Active Cyber Defence, employing the skills, knowledge,

and technical expertise of GCHQ working with Internet service providers to tackle a significant proportion of the cyber attacks that hit the UK, and so provide a new level of protection for British cyberspace.

We are also committed to making sure that people of all ages – and especially children – can enjoy the Internet safely.

The Government has begun work on a new Internet Safety Strategy, which I will be leading. It is clear that government, industry, regulators, families, and individuals all have a role to play.

In order to tackle children's exposure to harmful sexualised content online, we will continue to support companies in rolling out family-friendly filters to all broadband customers and introduce age verification controls.

6. Maintaining the UK Government as the world's leader in serving its citizens online

Just as citizens want to be safe, they want their public services to be improved by the use of digital technology, which can radically advance the efficiency of our public services – raising standards and lowering costs for taxpayers.

The UK is already a world leader in digital government – topping last year's UN survey of e-government – but we want to go further and faster. Citizens and businesses deserve an even better, more coherent experience when using government services online – one that matches the expectations set by the best apps and websites they use every day

7. Unlocking the power of data and improve public confidence in its use

Finally, I want to make clear that the Government understands that the public also want to be confident in the use of data – and that data is essential for world-class public services and business alike.

To maintain our position at the forefront of the data revolution, we will implement the EU General Data Protection Regulation in time for the May 2018 deadline.

So in conclusion, this is a Digital Strategy that is rooted in the Government's plan for a country that works for everyone. We want the UK to lead on the global stage and ensure that no-one at home is left behind.

It contains ambitious plans for infrastructure, connectivity, skills, business, safety and security, online government services, and data – guided by experts, underpinned by investment, and led by a Government that will work with industry to address challenges and build on existing strengths.

This will be a joint effort, and this strategy is just the start. I am looking forward to chairing a new Digital Economy Council, working side by

side with all of you in the tech community to make our digital economy both stronger and fairer.

Together, we really will lead the charge and change the world.

Thank you. ENDS

Statement to Parliament: East Midlands rail franchise pre-qualification

Today (1 March 2017) the Department for Transport [has announced](#) that the following companies have successfully pre-qualified to bid in the competition for the East Midlands franchise, to run rail passenger services from November 2018:

- Arriva Rail East Midlands Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Arriva UK Trains Limited
- First Trenitalia East Midlands Rail Limited, a joint venture company wholly owned by First Rail Holdings Limited and Trenitalia UK Limited
- Stagecoach East Midlands Trains Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Stagecoach Transport Holdings Limited

In order to pass the pre-qualification evaluation each of the prospective bidders had to demonstrate that they have the financial strength, safety and operational experience to run this important franchise. This announcement marks another key milestone in the rail franchising programme and is the next step in delivering real benefits for the passengers along the East Midlands routes.

In due course, once the 'Invitation to tender' has been issued, the bidders will be required to submit plans to demonstrate how they will deliver the enhancements for passengers using the East Midland services.

The department will evaluate the submitted bids to determine passenger benefits, deliverability, and value for money.

As for all rail franchise competitions, and as is consistent with the Secretary of State's duty, the department will ensure that alternative plans are in place for the continued running of passenger services in the event that the department determines that the bids would not provide services in the most efficient or economic manner.

News story: Nuclear Decommissioning Authority appoints David Peattie as Chief Executive Officer

David will be responsible for leading the NDA in the decommissioning and clean-up of 17 legacy nuclear sites across the UK, including Sellafield. He will assume the role from today, 1 March 2017, when the outgoing CEO, John Clarke, will step down after five years in the role.

The appointment was made by the non-executive members of the NDA Board, with the approval of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary of State Greg Clark.

In addition, as announced on 22 December 2016, Stephen Henwood stepped down yesterday (28 February 2017) on completion of his third term of office as NDA Chairman. He is being replaced by Tom Smith who was previously a Non-Executive Director of the NDA.

NDA Chairman Tom Smith said:

David brings with him significant global experience of leadership in the energy, oil and gas industries, and a strong track record in tackling complex commercial and engineering challenges in the UK and internationally.

I am delighted the NDA has secured a new CEO of such calibre and experience and I am looking forward to working with him in driving forward delivery of the vital mission to clear up the UK's nuclear legacy.

I would like to offer warm thanks to retiring Chief Executive John Clarke and would also like to thank Stephen for his excellent stewardship of the NDA over the last 9 years, and wish him well for the future. It has been a pleasure to serve on the board under him.

Energy Minister, Jesse Norman, said:

The NDA carries out essential work decommissioning and cleaning up the UK's nuclear legacy, keeping our citizens safe and secure and protecting the environment. David's considerable experience in roles across the energy sector makes him well-placed to lead the organisation and take this vital work forward.

I would also like to thank Stephen Henwood and John Clarke for their years of service and wish John well in retirement.

David Peattie said:

It is a privilege to have been asked to take on this important role, which is central to delivering the important mission of decommissioning the UK's nuclear legacy.

The NDA, its subsidiaries and Site Licence Companies, have a highly-skilled and focused workforce, and I look forward to working with them to drive forward progress on clearing our sites for future generations.

Prior to taking up his role at the NDA David Peattie was Chief Executive Officer at Fairfield Energy, where he led the successful turnaround of performance of North Sea assets and oversaw the start of the decommissioning project for the Dunlin Alpha Platform.

David began his career at British Petroleum in 1979 as a petroleum engineer and during his 33 years at the company held a number of technical, commercial and senior management positions. His roles at BP included Head of BP Group Investor Relations, Commercial Director of BP Chemicals, Deputy Head of global Exploration & Production, Head of BP Group Planning, and finally as Head of BP Russia where he was responsible for BP's interests in the TNK-BP joint venture as well as its businesses in the Russian Arctic and Sakhalin. In addition, he was BP's lead Director on the board of TNK-BP and Chairman of its Health, Safety and Environment Committee.

David is a Chartered Engineer and Member of Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (Petroleum Engineering).