

Speech: Developing a UK-Ireland higher education and research partnership

It's an honour to be here today with such a distinguished group of researchers, teachers and innovators from our 2 countries. And a pleasure to speak alongside my esteemed counterpart John Halligan.

Today is a good opportunity to celebrate the special relationship between our 2 countries – and also to deepen it, building on our relationships in the fields of research, innovation, and higher education.

As the Prime Minister said in her Mansion House speech, the UK is committed to establishing a far-reaching science and innovation pact with the EU. It is our aim that Britain remains at the forefront of collective endeavours to better understand, and make better, the world in which we live. The exchange of ideas and of researchers is essential to this.

UK-Ireland collaboration on research

The UK and Ireland collaborate through a number of EU multilateral forums, not least Horizon 2020. We are working together on a dizzying range of cutting edge projects. We're collaborating to find new ways to unlock the energy potential of our oceans through the Marinet project. We are deepening our understanding of serious illnesses, through the Joint Programming Initiative for Neurodegenerative Disease Research. We are working out how best to deploy Ebola vaccine through the EBODAC project. These are just a few of the inspiring examples of joint projects our 2 countries are involved in. Indeed, we are Ireland's second most frequent collaborator in Horizon 2020 projects.

We are also proud of our bilateral work together, like the BBSRC's lead agency agreement with Science Foundation Ireland, which to date has funded 14 applications, totalling nearly £8 million.

In the last five years, the UK's Research Council funded 119 projects involving partners based in Ireland, representing a total value of £146 million.

When it comes to innovation, I believe the UK has much to gain from working with Ireland.

I'm excited by projects like the new partnership between the cities of Belfast and Dublin to develop new, clean solutions to deliver goods within cities. Cracking the problem of 'last mile' distribution could mean cheaper goods, more reliable deliveries, and cleaner air – 3 big prizes.

Ireland has over the last 30 years built a powerful and dynamic knowledge economy, attracting investment from abroad and encouraging entrepreneurship at home. As the UK pushes ahead with our Industrial Strategy, increasing our

investment in R&D and creating the opportunity for high-growth businesses to thrive, we have much to learn from Ireland's successes.

Higher education

Our long history of partnership carries over into the other half of my brief: higher education. Of 15,000 Irish students studying abroad, two-thirds of them are in the UK. And Ireland is the fifth most popular country for UK students studying abroad.

We are keen to maintain our partnership with Ireland as the UK leaves the EU. Indeed, we want it not just to continue, but to get stronger. We welcome Irish students to the UK. And we have no intention to cut or cap international student numbers.

Students from Ireland bring greater diversity to our campuses, an international dimension to the experience of everyone at our universities. They stimulate demand for courses, and add to the UK's impressive research capacity.

In the short term they bring welcome income to UK universities, and to the economies of our towns and cities. In the longer term, they offer something even more valuable: the prospect of ongoing business, political, cultural and research links between our 2 countries. Long may this continue.

That is why we have made a commitment to maintaining rights of Irish nationals to access higher and further education courses on equal terms to UK nationals, on a reciprocal basis. This includes rights to qualify for student loans and support under applicable schemes and subject to relevant eligibility conditions.

We are working towards agreeing the high-level principles with Ireland, and considering the exact details of future eligibility criteria for student loans and support in England following the end of the Implementation Period in December 2020, including ways to ensure that Irish students continue to have access to student finance support.

The future

At today's conference we'll be discussing a wide range of areas for future collaboration. They range from life science to agri-food to space and satellite technologies, and from pure research to innovation projects taking place within businesses.

Wider EU relationship

I would also like to say a few words about the UK's wider science and research plans as we prepare to leave the European Union. The UK is an active and valued participant in European research and innovation programmes.

The UK and EU Joint Report, published in December, sets out that UK entities'

right to participate in EU programmes, including Horizon 2020, will be unaffected by the UK's withdrawal from the EU. In the areas of citizens' rights and the financial settlement, we have translated all of the commitments we made in December, delivering on our promise to reflect the Joint Report in the Withdrawal Agreement.

The Joint Report envisages that existing projects will continue to receive uninterrupted funding for the lifetime of the project.

We want to assure the EU of our commitment to ongoing collaboration in Science and Innovation; we want to work together on a mutually beneficial outcome. This potentially includes continuing to take part in those programmes that are greatly to the UK's and the EU's joint advantage, such as those that promote science, education and culture.

To that end, we would like to ensure that the new FP9 remains open to our association. We recognise that such an association would necessarily involve an appropriate financial contribution in line with other associates, and would like to discuss the details. In turn, our priorities are that FP9 remains focused on excellence, EU-added value, and openness to the world, as we outlined in our position paper, and that the programme allows associated countries a suitable degree of influence, in recognition of the benefits they bring to it and in line with their financial contributions. To this end, we intend to engage fully and constructively in the design of FP9.

We hope that our future participation in FP9 will provide us with a further opportunity to collaborate with Ireland, alongside our bilateral partnerships.

Conclusion

Our relationship with Ireland in the fields of research, innovation and higher education is of the utmost importance to us. Together, we can do better research, promote our mutual prosperity, and build on the deep cultural links between our countries.

I am delighted to share a platform today with John Halligan, and with so many distinguished innovators from our 2 nations, as we seek to deepen our partnership.

[Press release: Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Mauritania in May 2018](#)

Mr Samuel Thomas has been appointed Her Majesty's first ever resident Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Previously Mr Thomas Reilly was Her Majesty's non-resident Ambassador, based in Rabat, Morocco. The UK is

also upgrading its existing office in Nouakchott to an Embassy.

Mr Thomas will take up his appointment during May 2018. The UK has had an office in Mauritania since 2011. The move to upgrade it to an Embassy is a sign of the UK's growing bilateral relationship with Mauritania and its commitment to the region.

On Mr Thomas's appointment, the Foreign Secretary said:

I am delighted that we are enhancing our representation in Mauritania, and hope that our relationship continues to grow, particularly in trade. We are strengthening our diplomatic, security and development engagement across North Africa and the Sahel, and this Mission is another example of Global Britain: outward facing and forging stronger relationships around the world.

Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister of State at the Department for International Development, Alistair Burt added:

This is an exciting new chapter as we deepen our links across the region and I particularly look forward to visiting later in the year.

Mr Thomas has worked in the public and private sector, focusing on energy, trade and terrorism. He joined the FCO in 2009 to work on UN Security Council policy, before moving to the Middle East and North Africa Directorate. He has previously served overseas in Tripoli, Moscow and Baghdad.

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Full name: Samuel Thomas

2018 to present Pre-posting training

2015 to 2017 Baghdad, Head Counter-Terrorist Finance, Economic and Energy Section

2015 Moscow, Energy Policy

2013 – 2015 Tripoli, Political and Economic Consultant (on leave from FCO)

2011 – 2013 Tripoli, Deputy latterly Head, Commercial Section

2011 FCO/Cabinet Office, Chief of Staff, Cross-Whitehall Libya Oil Cell

2009 – 2011 FCO, UN Security Council Desk Officer, International Organisations Department

Further information

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[Press release: Dr Fox: global trade will work for every part of the UK](#)

Latest ONS trade figures show UK exports rose 9.2% (£52.8billion) to £628.8 billion from April 2017 to the end of March 2018.

The country's renowned service sector continues to thrive with exports up 9% to £284 billion, increasing the service surplus to £109.2 billion.

Goods exports also rose strongly by 9.3% to £344.9 billion.

Exports continue to grow faster than imports with the overall trade deficit narrowing by £13.3 billion from £39.9 billion to £26.6 billion.

Separate data released by HMRC shows the UK's exports of fuels (including coal, oil and gas) was £27.3 billion in the year to March 2018. The largest buyers of these goods include Netherlands, Belgium and China.

Sales of food and drink also continue to soar, with exports of Scotch whisky rising by 21% to £4.4 billion. Top markets for these goods were the USA, France and Singapore.

The figures come as Dr Fox is in Aberdeen and meets representatives from Oil and Gas UK, the UK's largest business body for the offshore oil and gas industry.

He will discuss raising the profile of an industry that hires more than 120,000 people in the UK and generates turnover of around £30 billion – of which 40% comes from exports.

He will also meet staff from Wood plc, which recently became a FTSE 100 company following a large acquisition, and will see first-hand the brewing process at Deanston Distillery where he will meet representatives from the

Scotch Whisky Association.

International Trade Secretary Liam Fox said:

Today's trade figures show exports rising and the trade deficit falling as households across the UK feel the benefits of a stronger economy – from more skilled jobs to increased prosperity.

It's clear evidence the world wants to buy high-quality UK good and services, and my department is putting the country in a position to benefit. That's why I'm meeting Scottish businesses driving this export boom in sectors covering oil & gas and Scotch whisky to ensure we succeed on the global stage.

As an international economic department, we're creating an independent trade policy for the first time in forty years that will work for every part of the UK.

Dr Fox also used the visit to announce he will chair the DIT's Board of Trade in Stirling next week to ensure the department is meeting the needs of businesses, exporters and inward investors across the country.

Further information

- [Read the latest UK trade statistics on the Office for National Statistics website](#)
- [View HMRC trade in goods data](#)
- Oil and Gas figures quoted are from [Review of the UK Oilfield Services Industry](#) published by EY in January 2018

[News story: Rail Minister launches review of tree cutting alongside rail lines](#)

- tree felling to be suspended during current nesting season
- study will focus on safety, performance and minimising harm to wildlife
- Tree Council and RSPB are part of consultation

A review of Network Rail's tree cutting and vegetation management has been

announced by Rail Minister Jo Johnson.

The Rail Minister has asked Network Rail to suspend all felling during the current bird nesting season, except where safety critical.

The review will consider how Network Rail can best ensure the safety of our railways, while also protecting wildlife and preserving trees.

It will also build on areas of existing best practice in vegetation management within the organisation.

Network Rail is the fourth largest landowner in the UK and in the past 4 years has made significant progress in improving the management of trees alongside train tracks. But last year alone there were an estimated 1,500 incidents involving trees and bad weather which caused widespread travel disruption to rail passengers.

Jo Johnson, Rail Minister, said:

How we manage our trees and vegetation – and protect the wildlife that lives in and around them – is an important issue.

It is right that Network Rail are able to remove trees that could be dangerous, or impact on the reliability of services. In the last year, vegetation management and related incidents have cost the railway £100 million.

But I also understand that cutting back trees can alarm people who enjoy these environments – and can especially raise concerns over the effect on birds during nesting season.

That is why I am commissioning this review. In the meantime I have asked Network Rail to suspend all felling during the current nesting season, except where it is safety critical.

The review will look at whether Network Rail has the capacity and capability to manage vegetation in a way that minimises harm to wildlife. It will also look at whether staff need more training – for instance in identifying approaches to managing them that would be better than felling.

In launching it, the Department for Transport has consulted with the Tree Council and the RSPB. The review will report its findings to the minister in the summer.

Rail media enquiries

Media enquiries
020 7944 3021

Out of hours media enquiries

020 7944 4292

Switchboard
0300 330 3000

News story: Announcing the new UK Criminal Records Trade Body (CRTB)

The group, called the Criminal Records Trade Body (CRTB) will form a committee within the National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS).

The CRTB is open to all organisations registered with the DBS, Disclosure Scotland and Access NI. They will work together to promote a culture of safeguarding and referral.

The group will provide an authoritative and independent voice, representing a wide range of sectors using criminal record check information, during an unprecedented period of change and digitisation of services. Aims and objectives of the group include:

- supporting the UK's safeguarding agenda
- encouraging the adoption of enhanced identity verification processes
- supporting candidates and users in understanding eligibility of checks, and highlighting the work of [SAFERjobs](#) in preventing employment screening scams
- contributing and commenting on the development of policy and legislation
- promoting best practice and awareness of overseas criminal record checks

Founding members explained:

The group will play a vital role in supporting the UK's criminal record agencies to engage with a network of organisations who access criminal record check information.

The group hopes to attract organisations, and individuals, passionate about criminal record checking across a wide range of sectors and engage in dialogue to improve existing processes that will support the safeguarding agenda.

Sue Smith, DBS Director of Safeguarding said, "we welcome the formulation of the CRTB and look forward to engaging with its members as we continue to improve the services offered by the DBS to help protect vulnerable groups in

our society.”

The CRTB is founded by: Atlantic Data, Credence, Experian, GB Group, Reed and Security Watchdog.

If you are interested in joining the CRTB, then please register your interest with the NAPBS by emailing CRTB@napbs.org.uk.