

Ministry of Defence confirms the death of Fusilier Sam Brownridge

It is with great sadness that the Ministry of Defence must announce the death of a soldier from The First Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

Fusilier Sam Brownridge died of a non-battle injury while deployed on Operation Cabrit in Estonia on Saturday 04 July 2020.

Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this tragic time.

New Eurostar treaties open up direct travel from Amsterdam to London

Direct high-speed train services from Amsterdam to London will be possible later this year, after new agreements were signed today (7 July).

For these services to operate, existing agreements between the UK, France and Belgium signed in 1993 have been modified to include the Netherlands. Representatives from all four countries signed the treaties at a ceremony in Brussels.

The Home Office-led treaty concerning Frontier Control arrangements extends the existing model of “juxtaposed border checks” to the Netherlands; whereby passengers are checked, prior to departure, successively by border officials from the departure and arrival countries.

This means UK Border Force officials will be stationed in Amsterdam and Rotterdam and able to carry out checks before boarding, as they already do in France and Belgium. It also allows for further cooperation between the police forces of the 4 countries involved in the fight against cross-border crime.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

This important treaty shows that while we have left the European Union, our links with Europe are stronger than ever.

It will enable vital security and immigration checks to be carried out in the Netherlands, protecting the UK’s border and providing faster and more efficient journeys for passengers.

Alongside this, The Department for Transport-led quadripartite Security Arrangement will give responsibility for security to the government of the country in which the service is operating from. The Dutch authorities will become responsible for the security of Dutch stations operating UK bound services, and for train security, such as the screening of passengers.

These new arrangements will enable direct services between the Netherlands and the UK to start operating later this year, without the need to change trains at Brussels for immigration and security checks – making it easier for passengers to carry on their journey.

Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps said:

As we begin to emerge from one of the greatest international challenges of our time, we're working hard to support the recovery of international transport and tourism sectors.

Investment in modern, convenient and more environmentally friendly high speed rail links between major European cities will help drive this recovery so these sectors can flourish once again.

The signing of these treaties today will enable the launch of direct return services from the Netherlands to London, which is fantastic news for both the UK and our European neighbours.

Stientje van Veldhoven, Dutch State Secretary for Infrastructure, said:

Due to coronavirus these are challenging times, but we also have to plan for the near future. The new direct train service enables us to travel from Amsterdam to London in just over four hours. It's fast and convenient, and without the hassle of disembarking in Brussels for border and security checks.

A Eurostar train roughly has twice as many seats as an average airplane on the Amsterdam-London route and CO2 emissions are significantly lower. The train service to London therefore is a sustainable and competitive alternative to flying.

All 4 states have been working closely with Eurostar to provide support and guidance on security procedures and the necessary infrastructure arrangements at the 2 stations. The new agreements form an important step in further facilitating efficient rail traffic between close neighbouring countries.

[Priti Patel to tackle violence and abuse against shopworkers](#)

The Home Secretary has today (Tuesday 7 July) set out plans to crack down on abuse and violence against shopworkers.

The steps, which are detailed in the [Home Office's response to a call for evidence](#) on the issue, are designed to improve support for victims and ensure perpetrators face justice.

They include working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) on a best practice guide to support staff in reporting these crimes, strengthening and making full use of existing laws, and improving data sharing between businesses and the police.

In addition, the Crime and Policing Minister will write to PCCs and Chief Constables underscoring the importance of working closely with local businesses to tackle this issue and emphasising that the theft of goods valued up to £200 from a shop should be prosecuted as a criminal offence.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

As the daughter of shopkeepers, I know what a vital role they play within our communities and just how tirelessly they have worked during the coronavirus pandemic.

I will not tolerate violence and abuse against any shopworker and it's right that those who commit these crimes must be caught and punished.

Kit Malthouse, Minister of State for Crime and Policing said:

Shopworkers are the beating hearts of our communities and violence or abuse against them is utterly unacceptable.

Through the NRCSG, we are developing solutions which address concerns highlighted by the retail sector.

We are determined to drive down these crimes and crucially, ensure that shopworkers are fully supported in reporting incidents to the police.

The government is taking action to tackle violent crime of all types, including by recruiting 20,000 new police officers over the next 3 years.

The call for evidence was open for 12 weeks. Organisations and individuals were asked to contribute to the government's understanding of the problem.

Responses were sought from retailers, trade associations and unions, as well as those working in the retail industry. Nearly 3,500 individuals, businesses and other organisations engaged in the process.

The majority of respondents believed abuse toward shop staff has increased and a significant number said they did not report incidents to the police.

The government response sets out a programme of work designed to address the drivers of violence and assaults against shopworkers and provide effective support to victims in reporting such crimes.

In terms of sentencing, laws announced in the Queen's Speech contain proposals for tougher community penalties, tackling the underlying drivers of offending such as mental health or drug and alcohol addiction.

The Sentencing Council is reviewing its guidelines for courts on assault and published interim guidance in April 2020 clarifying that it should be treated as an aggravating factor when assault involves threats around Covid-19 (eg spitting or coughing). It is already an aggravating factor for an offence to be committed against anyone providing a service to the public.

More widely, the government is taking steps to improve support for all victims of crime, including a future consultation on a Victims' Law.

[Case studies for Making Tax Digital](#)

Businesses from across the country have taken the time to tell us their experiences of Making Tax Digital for VAT:

The local garage – Tyr-Ex Ltd

Tyr-Ex Ltd have been in the motor trade for over 35 years supplying and fitting tyres in Durham and surrounding areas. Their founder Gwyn Morgan told us how Making Tax Digital and their accountant has helped the business:

When it first emerged that things would change, for my company through Making Tax Digital, I was very worried about how I would have to change the way I do my accounts. I had been doing them my way for 36 years, year in year out.

However, after speaking to my accountant and attending their

informative seminars everything just fell into place. My accountant provided me with an innovative Making Tax Digital solution, which really helped me by reducing the time I needed to spend on VAT returns – time which I have little of.

Making Tax Digital, with my accountant's support, means it's a lot less stressful for me now, as it helps me get all of my figures right, keeping me on the right side of HMRC.

The accountancy firm – Turpin Barker Armstrong

Turpin Barker Armstrong (TBA) is an accountancy firm in the Greater London/Surrey borders area that has been servicing clients for over 30 years. Partner Dean Clark told us how the introduction of Making Tax Digital has helped streamline the business:

We recognised that the introduction of Making Tax Digital gave us the opportunity to help our clients to streamline their working practices. We partnered with our software provider and set about training our clients on the new regulations and digital options available to them, which helped them to keep up-to-date records of their transactions and financial information, which in turn helped us to provide accurate bookkeeping services and prepare timely accounts.

Although initially, staff and clients were concerned about the practical impacts of Making Tax Digital it has been a valuable and efficient process benefiting both professional practices and clients.

The IT consultancy – Allsorts Consultants

Allsorts Consultants Ltd are based in Cheddleton, Staffordshire. Duncan, one of the Directors, talks about how Making Tax Digital is a no-brainer for his business:

As a technical IT consultant, it was important that my business was digital from day one.

By using online software recommended by my accountant, it has made the day-to-day aspects of running a business very straightforward. Bank to bank transfers are quick and easy for example and I don't have to worry about big piles of paperwork and dealing with old-

fashioned payment methods such as cheques.

Making Tax Digital simplifies running a business in an increasingly online world and I can't imagine doing it any other way.

The accountancy firm – PKB Accountants

PKB is a firm of chartered certified accountants serving the Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire areas. The company's director, Steve Greehy shared his experience of Making Tax Digital and how it has helped the firm and their customers navigate COVID-19.

Making Tax Digital has allowed us to transition more of our clients to digital software. This has proved invaluable during COVID-19 with restrictions inhibiting us from seeing customers face-to-face. With everything done digitally, we've been able to continue to manage client accounts seamlessly.

Working closely with our clients, we ensure a smooth transition and teach the benefits of the system including less paperwork, more accurate bookkeeping and the availability of real-time tax information.

The creative agency – Breeze Creative Design Consultants

Nicola Mackinlay is the Director of Breeze Creative Design Consultants, and she shared with us her experience of Making Tax Digital:

The thought of 'Making Tax Digital' was quite daunting to me at the start, I had been using Excel spreadsheets to run our accounts for 15 years and I was reluctant to change! I put it off for about two years before having to switch to Cloud software for VAT purposes. On the advice of my accountants, I converted to Making Tax Digital software and was pleased to find the system really easy to use.

Having worked with the system now for about a year, I find it very straight forward and only very occasionally have a query but I contact my accountant and they help me quickly sort it.

VAT returns are super easy to do now and take only minutes as the

Making Tax Digital software does all the work for you.

I am very happy with the difference going digital has made to the way we run the business, and how it has improved our efficiencies.

The accountancy firm – French Duncan Chartered Accountants

French Duncan are a leading independent provider of accountancy and business advisory services operating from 4 offices across Central Scotland. They took the time to tell us how Making Tax Digital has benefited both them and their clients:

Many clients do fear changing the way they manage their finances and accounts; they've often used the same processes and systems for many years, sometimes generations, and so are used to how they operate. Making Tax Digital however forced their hand to some extent, but in doing so it also enabled us to really engage with our clients about what they need from their financial systems, and how these can improve how they run their business rather than just report on what has happened historically.

We have now helped numerous clients make the transition to Making Tax Digital, and in doing so most now use systems much more suited and more useful for their day-to-day operations – and which are more robust and future-proofed too. Not only does this help improve their efficiency, it also helps us as their accountants focus energy on advising them on future improvements, rather than just on reporting what has gone before.

It has become clear that the idea of real time management information and the benefits it brings has become more appealing in the current period of uncertainty. Many businesses have had to adopt new processes and methods of selling their goods and services so real-time information allows them to focus on fine tuning these changes.

The dentist – Rock House Dental Practice

Rock House Dental Practice is based in Wells, Somerset. Hannah, one of the Practice Partners, describes how Making Tax Digital has benefitted her business:

With Making Tax Digital coming into effect, I knew I needed to move to a Cloud based accountancy package. From the outset, my accountant was on hand to recommend a suitable software for my business, and provide me with the training, guidance and support on how to get the software set up and make it user friendly for my needs.

My Making Tax Digital software has enabled me to not only keep on top of my bookkeeping, but it has allowed me to collaborate with both my business partner and my accountant to input data, track my finances and spending, produce monthly payments and organise payroll for my employees. On top of this, the biggest benefit to me is the 24/7 access it allows, I can access it anytime and from anywhere. As a busy mum this is ideal as I can even check my accounts while on the school run!

The accountancy firm – Dunkley’s Chartered Accountants

Dunkley’s Chartered Accountants are one of the leading independent practices in Bristol and the South West. Amber Vierke is Dunkley’s Making Tax Digital and Cloud Specialist and she shared her experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#).

Initially, Making Tax Digital was a challenge to put forward to clients. They saw it as an ‘unknown’ which was going to take them time to understand and get used to. However, once the benefits were portrayed to them, and we were able to provide them with support and guidance on how it works – together with how it could suit their individual businesses, the mindset changed. They saw how Making Tax Digital could positively improve their businesses and began to embrace the new ways of working.

For us as a business, Making Tax Digital has been a great opportunity. We have been able to spend the time to talk to each of our clients individually and discuss their evolving needs in detail. We have not only been able to provide them with the advice and support they need with regards to transitioning over to compliant software, but have also been able to discuss further opportunities on how we can help support their business moving forward both from an accountancy and advisory standpoint. Making Tax Digital has been a catalyst for us to further help our clients streamline their processes and improve their business efficiencies.

The hardware shop – Sykes Retail Limited

Linzy owns Sykes Retail Limited, a hardware shop in Bristol. She took the time to tell us how Making Tax Digital has helped her business.

When Making Tax Digital was coming into effect my accountant advised me that it would make the most sense to convert to cloud software as this would enable me with the collaboration and instant back up I required to get peace of mind. During set up, I found it tricky to get started.

However, with my accountant's support things soon became clear and I was able to learn how to always keep my bookkeeping up to date. I also learnt how to do my VAT returns and submit these to HMRC which helps both my business and the production of my year end accounts.

The accountancy firm – TaxAssist Accountants

TaxAssist Accountants in Plymouth was established in 2006 and has two shopfront offices in the city centre and Peverell areas. Its small business clients come from varying sectors, including the trades, professional services, technology and healthcare. Its owner Alex Smith tells us how [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#) has helped his business.

Making Tax Digital for VAT provided us a springboard to accelerate the adoption of online accounting software across our clients. It helped us introduce new services including daily bookkeeping and, in turn, our clients now have significantly more up to date financial information and can make better business decisions as a result.

The introduction of Making Tax Digital for VAT-based businesses was a practical starting point and not a huge leap for these businesses that were making quarterly VAT submissions already. There were some concerns in the run up to the system going live but in the end it just worked, the process was smooth and passed without a problem.

The mobile farm administrator

Jennifer Day is a mobile farm administrator working on several large and multi-enterprise estates in South Wiltshire. She is also a member of the Institute of Agricultural Secretaries and Administrators. Jennifer shared with us her experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

I tried out the early Making Tax Digital software in June 2018 and I was very impressed at how HMRC and my software provider collaborated to make the system work. I believe I was my software provider's second client filing my business VAT return, and I did so by the end of 2018. I particularly remember the enthusiasm of everyone involved and the collective determination to make Making Tax Digital a success.

I found setting up the system so straightforward and all of my clients were filing their monthly VAT returns through Making Tax Digital from early in 2019.

When asked I always say it is so straightforward, quick and reliable I wonder what all the fuss was about.

The family-run farm – North Farm

Victoria Snell is a Farm Secretary at her family run crop farm – North Farm in Dorset. As a busy secretary and farmers wife, Victoria took a few moments to tell us about her experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

I have been a Farm Secretary for over 8 years now, and being in this privileged position I get a fascinating insight into the running of the business. North Farm grows combinable crops in a stunning part of East Dorset using the latest technology.

One of my many roles in the office is the bookkeeping and on a farm that harvests over 3,000 acres there are a huge number of inputs and outputs to keep track of. Our VAT return is performed on a monthly basis and it is made easy via the software we use.

I submitted our first Making Tax Digital return a year ago on 28 February 2019 and was pleasantly surprised at how simple it was – it was easier and quicker than a manual return. It took a few steps to get to the position where I was ready to submit but I was guided along the way with clear information from both HMRC and our software provider. Making Tax Digital is not as daunting as I believed it would be and I feel the benefits in the time it saves, as well as the clarity of the information that the software provides.

The family business – Mower Magic

Mower Magic is a family business based in Lincoln dealing in domestic and professional gardening and lawn care products. Owner John Hall tells us about his experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

The introduction of Making Tax Digital gave us the ideal opportunity to change the software we were using to future-proof our bookkeeping systems and processes. We were pleasantly surprised that the transition to our new Making Tax Digital-compatible software was relatively easy as it was seamlessly managed with the help of our accountant.

We found switching to Making Tax Digital also gave us the additional benefit of being able to access up-to-date financial figures, giving us a daily handle on our business' finances and performance, that wasn't there previously. Making Tax Digital has made the submission process so simple and we find it really comforting to receive an instant acknowledgement from HMRC when we submit our VAT return.

The rural business professional

Fiona Ives is a self-employed rural business professional (farm secretary) based near Basingstoke. Fiona previously lived and worked on a dairy farm and she now shares her expertise and experience with other farming businesses. Fiona told us about her experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

I have helped many farms move from manual (or excel spreadsheets) to digital records and they're all getting on fantastically well with it. I think it's fair to say most people would have been reluctant to make the change to digital but I'm sure most of them would now say it's been a really positive change. I am a member of the local branch of The Institute of Agricultural Secretaries and Administrators Ltd (IAgSA) and we had a few training sessions before the MTD deadline, people were concerned how it was going to all work.

However, MTD for VAT has been nothing but straightforward. As a Farm Secretary all of my clients were already using accounts software. It just took loading the programme update, following the MTD set-up wizard, and onto the HMRC website to apply to sign up for MTD. Within a very short space of time I had a message from HMRC to say I had the go ahead. So back into the accounts software, and I set it up ready for MTD. Then at the end of the first MTD VAT

return (having done my usual checks through the figures) I pressed the button and off went the VAT return.

It went through very smoothly indeed – no finding my login details, no waiting for the text message with the code, no entering the figures and checking and double-checking they were correctly entered, and no finding my login details again to go back in for confirmation! Straightaway I had confirmation it had gone through and a receipt back from HMRC.

What had I been worried about? It was so straightforward, quick and reassuring! I have also set up an arable farm on the software who had until then been doing their accounts manually – the whole process could not have been easier. From manual to computerised accounts might seem like a bit of a leap, but I hope other farms have found it as positive an experience as my clients have. It's obviously been essential for MTD VAT, but having computerised accounts brings so many other benefits to the business – for the farmer, their accountant and their book-keeper!

The accountancy firm – DSG

DSG is an independent accountancy and advisory firm in the North West with an HQ in Liverpool and two offices in Liverpool City and North Wales. Andrew Moss is a partner in the Corporate department of DSG and he has been with the company since 2003. Andrew shared with us his, and his clients experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

Making Tax Digital, while it might not have felt like it, has given us a great opportunity to talk to clients about their systems and help them, where need be, to transition to an environment where they are getting, or have the ability to get, more timely information about their business. This process continues for the clients where our bridging software has been employed. Some of the owner-managed businesses with turnovers of up to £5m and still employing excel-based bookkeeping systems now have timely management information and the ability to access their financial data from their phone or tablet. We have seen that these are the businesses that have the ability to make informed decisions that ultimately improve their businesses.

MTD has provided an opportunity for our clients to address other systems within their business, whether it be around stock management, credit control, staff expenses or project management. The new cloud 'eco-system' has a multitude of bolt-on apps which

are able to interact directly with the cloud-based accounting systems, enabling business owners to operate in a more efficient and effective way as well as having a better oversight of the business performance. Some clients have struggled, but we have been able to support them with an outsourced service enabling them to not only meet their reporting obligations, but also to have the business insight on a regular basis.

While initially MTD was seen as another burden on business, the wider digital benefits have to be seen as a positive as business owners can embrace new applications and improve their business processes to be more robust and efficient than in a pre-MTD world. And, of course, we are happy to help them along the way.

The estate agent – Downen Estate Agents

Downen Estate Agents is a business based in the North East of England. It has 8 branches covering the mid North East from the coast to the A1 corridor. It was founded in 1982 by Managing Director Denis Downen. Denis shares his experience of [Making Tax Digital for VAT](#):

When I first learned that Making Tax Digital was becoming mandatory for businesses above the VAT threshold, I admit I was sceptical. As a business dealing in property sales, purchases, auctions and property management there are a great deal of transactions to track from a VAT perspective, and I certainly did not want the process to become overly complicated.

However, I learned more about MTD for VAT on GOV.UK and I spoke to my accountant. I soon realised that as we already kept many financial records digitally, signing up to MTD and submitting via MTD for VAT was the next natural step for us. I found the process relatively straightforward and it did not take long to become business as usual across the business.

MTD also acted as a catalyst for the expansion of our digital record keeping. Having been in business almost 40 years, we did have considerable paper-based records. However, we moved more and more of these to a digital basis and saw many immediate benefits – not just the instant accessibility of records across our branches, but also the time it freed up for colleagues as they accessed records easily and immediately. At the end of the day, anything that frees up resource so our staff can focus all their time on providing a 5-star service to our customers is very welcome.

94th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Ambassador Gomez, Mr Chair, congratulations on your new role! The United Kingdom is grateful to you, and to the Director-General, for your efforts to ensure that this meeting can go ahead safely.

Thanks to decisions taken by States Parties, on 7 June 2020 control measures covering a range of toxic chemicals, including the Novichok agent used in Salisbury in 2018, officially entered into force. This helps to ensure these deadly chemical weapons are never used again. And it demonstrates the enduring importance of the OPCW's work.

Preventing the use of chemical weapons is this Organisation's top priority. That's why we welcomed publication of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team in April. We are grateful to the Director-General, and to the coordinator of the IIT, Ambassador Oñate, for the briefing they held on 8 April. The United Kingdom set out its views in our statement of 14 April – in short, the IIT report showed there is no room for any reasonable doubt about Syria's responsibility for the three attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017. Syria used chemical weapons, in direct violation of the Convention.

We, as Executive Council members, must now take action on the findings of the report, in preparation for the next Conference of States Parties in November. It is our duty to uphold and implement the principles enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention. We must address compliance failings where they are identified, and Syria must urgently take steps to redress the situation. We owe it to the victims of these terrible attacks.

Mr Chair,

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tragedy for some, and has created uncertainty for us all. And it has underlined the importance of international cooperation, and unity in dealing with common threats.

We have all had to adapt to try to get business done differently. The United Kingdom believes that it is crucial for the OPCW to be able to adapt to changing circumstances. Last month, I was pleased to participate in an online, interactive meeting on capacity building for designated laboratories. The UK is delighted to support this project, and pleased the meeting could go ahead virtually. This is a great example of the OPCW continuing its vital work online. We encourage the Technical Secretariat to be creative, and use all the tools at its disposal to ensure that its important work can continue.

With this in mind, the United Kingdom is keen to learn more about the Technical Secretariat's plans for resuming Article VI inspections when circumstances allow. The process will need to be fair and balanced. Openness

and transparency are essential to giving States Parties confidence that we are protecting the health and safety of everyone involved in the Article VI inspection process.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year, we recognise that current uncertainties in the global environment will require difficult decisions from us all. With this in mind, we look forward to receiving the budget proposal, which we will study carefully so that we can reach agreement on the best way forward for the OPCW.

Thank you Mr Chair.