

News story: David Mundell speech: 20 years of Scottish devolution

In a keynote speech in Edinburgh today [21 January] the Scottish Secretary will mark twenty years of Scottish devolution

Two decades on from the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, Mr Mundell will reaffirm that Brexit will further strengthen the devolution settlement, with new powers being transferred directly to Holyrood. He will also note that work is progressing well in developing new ways of joint working between the UK and Scottish governments. In the speech, he will also reject 'power grab' accusations.

Mr Mundell will say:

Devolution is working well:

I am a passionate supporter of devolution. I was proud to be elected as an MSP in that first intake in May 1999.

Two decades on, Holyrood has become one of the most powerful devolved parliaments in the world. Power and accountability are better balanced than ever before.

The vote in 1997 was re-affirmed by our decision in 2014 to remain part of the UK. And in the 2017 general election there was overwhelming support for devolutionist parties and support for a strong Scottish Parliament within the UK.

Reject 'power grab' accusations:

It was claimed that the Sewel Convention was breached or, if it hadn't been breached, it was not fit for purpose and must be changed. In fact, the Sewel Convention remains an essential element in the devolution settlement.

To listen to the rhetoric coming from some of my political opponents, you could be forgiven for thinking that Holyrood is being stripped of a whole raft of powers it currently exercises. It is complete fantasy; an invented grievance. The reality is that more than 100 powers previously exercised in Brussels will transfer to Edinburgh on the day we leave the EU.

To characterise this process as a 'power grab' is nonsense.

"We should remain deeply suspicious when opponents of devolution try to present themselves as its champions and protectors."

New ways of joint working with the Scottish Government:

In the years ahead, our two governments – and the devolved administrations elsewhere in the UK – will need to work more closely than ever before.

Going forward, I want to see a Scotland's two government's working closely together for the benefit of people in Scotland.

Scotland would be ill-served if one government cannot add to the work that is being done by another. The time is right for this. Scots expect their two governments to work together and politicians on all sides accept the need to work together.

Brexit will strengthen devolution:

I reject completely the argument put forward by opponents of devolution that it has been crushed by Brexit.

I do not believe Brexit will damage devolution. I want it to strengthen devolution, and I believe that can and will happen. Leaving the EU will bring new powers to Holyrood and new responsibilities to the Scottish Government.

Mr Mundell will be speaking this morning to an audience of businesses, academics and stakeholders at the Dovecot Studio in Edinburgh. The full speech will be available later today.

[Press release: Next generation of artificial intelligence talent to be trained at UK universities](#)

- New industry-funded AI Masters, and 16 dedicated Centres at universities across the country to train the next generation of AI PhDs
- prestigious Alan Turing Institute AI research fellowships now open – allowing Britain to retain and attract the very best global talent
- new figures show that inward investment to the UK AI sector has increased by 17% over the past year, more than the whole of Europe combined

Thousands of graduates to become qualified experts in artificial intelligence

(AI) as part of a new joint government-industry package to drive up skills in the AI sector, Business Secretary Greg Clark and Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright announced today (21 February 2019).

For the first time, the UK will have a nationwide programme of industry-funded AI Masters courses coupled with work-based placements.

The new skills and talent package is a major milestone of the modern Industrial Strategy's [AI Sector Deal](#) which was launched in April 2018. It is supported by industry funding and up to £110 million government investment, including:

- up to 200 new AI Masters places at UK universities funded by companies such as DeepMind, QuantumBlack, Cisco and BAE Systems. The Masters programme marks the first nationwide effort to address the skills gap at this level, in collaboration with the Institute of Coding and British Computer Society
- 1,000 students will have the opportunity to enhance their skills with new PhDs at 16 dedicated UK Research and Innovation AI Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), located across the country
- up to 5 AI research Fellowships, created in collaboration with The Alan Turing Institute to both attract and retain the best research talent from around the world.

The announcement comes as new figures prepared for Tech Nation by Dealroom.co reveal the number of venture capital investments into the UK's rapidly growing AI sector leapt by 17% last year.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The UK has long been a nation of innovators. This AI skills and talent investment will help nurture leading UK and international talent to ensure we retain our world-beating reputation in research and development.

Artificial intelligence has great potential to drive up productivity and enhance every industry throughout our economy, from more effective disease diagnosis to building smart homes. Today's announcement is our modern Industrial Strategy in action, investing in skills and talent to drive high skilled jobs, growth and productivity across the UK.

Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright said:

The UK is not only the birthplace to the father of artificial intelligence, Alan Turing, but we are leading the way on work to ensure AI innovation has ethics at its core.

We want to keep up this momentum and cement our reputation as pioneers in AI. Working with world class academic institutions and

industry we will be able to train the next generation of top-tier AI talent and maintain the UK's reputation as a trailblazer in emerging technologies.

As companies throughout the UK increasingly use AI in processes from manufacturing to fashion and construction to medical imaging, upskilling people to develop and maintain the new technology is crucial to its success in boosting productivity. This is part of the government's continued drive to be a world-leader in harnessing the economic benefits of AI and the data-driven revolution, as part of the modern Industrial Strategy.

The schemes, aimed at people of different stages in higher education and available to researchers at a variety of levels, helps to build advanced AI skills at all levels, a key commitment contained within the AI Sector Deal.

Dame Wendy Hall, AI Skills Champion said:

I'm delighted to see the recommendations of the review that Jérôme Pesenti and I wrote just over a year ago, coming to life in such a comprehensive set of skills and talent initiatives.

They provide a great impetus to developing AI skills and talent and I strongly encourage industry, universities and those of you who aspire to be part of putting the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution to get involved in these 3 initiatives.

Finally, to develop the best and brightest AI researchers in the UK, the government is funding a new globally prestigious Fellowship programme. The first wave has been launched by The Alan Turing Institute.

Adrian Smith, Institute Director, The Alan Turing Institute said:

Artificial intelligence represents an incredible opportunity to transform our economy and our lives for the better. The Turing AI Fellowships will be crucial in building UK leadership capability, driving forward ambitious research and ensuring that the UK can attract, retain, and develop world-leading research talent.

UK Research and Innovation Chief Executive, Professor Sir Mark Walport, said:

Artificial intelligence is a disruptive technology in a range of sectors, enabling new products and services and transforming data science. It allows us to develop new approaches to challenges as diverse as early disease diagnosis and climate change.

To maintain its leadership in AI, the UK will need a new generation of researchers, business leaders and entrepreneurs equipped with new skills. Working with partners across academia and industry, the

centres announced today will provide the foundations for these future leaders.

The Industrial Strategy sets out [Grand Challenges](#) to put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future, ensuring that the UK takes advantage of major global changes, improving people's lives and the country's productivity. Artificial intelligence and data is one of the 4 Grand Challenges which will see AI used across a variety of industries and put the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution. Exploring the best skills package to equip people with the expertise to make the most of AI was a key commitment of the AI and Data Grand Challenge's £950 million Sector Deal.

[News story: Pride of Kent report published](#)



Photo: REUTERS/Pascal Rossignol

Our report into the passenger ferry Pride of Kent striking a jetty and grounding in Calais, France on 10 December 2017, is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken: [read more](#).

Published 21 February 2019

[Speech: Standing united behind](#)

Ukraine's sovereignty

Thank you very much Madam President,

We welcome this debate and the opportunity to discuss the situation in Ukraine. I would like to start by joining those colleagues who reiterated the unwavering support to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, including within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters.

Today marks the annual commemorations of the lives sadly lost during the 2014 Euromaidan protests. We offer our deepest condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones.

Today also marks the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Russian military operation to illegally annex Crimea from Ukraine.

Madam President, last week my Russian colleague stood with Foreign Minister Arreaza and pledged to defend the UN Charter, this included 'respect for the sovereign equality of members' and 'respect for the territorial integrity and political independence of all states'.

However, the forcible Russian seizure of 10,000 square miles from Ukraine broke the first principle of international law: that countries may not acquire territory or change borders by force. It also violated a number of international agreements and commitments, including; Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Budapest memorandum and the 1997 Russia-Ukraine Treaty of Friendship.

The General Assembly reacted to Russia's actions by passing resolution 68/262 on 27 March 2014, affirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine – within its internationally recognised borders and the absence of any legal basis to change the status of Crimea.

Madam President,

As my German colleague said earlier, in another context in the Security Council, to listen to the Russian account of what happened in Crimea, one would think it was Ukraine that had invaded Russia. And not the other way round.

Madam President,

We do not only oppose the illegal annexation because it violates international law, we oppose it also because of the serious human rights violations Russia continues to commit in the Crimean peninsula. This includes the widespread persecution of ethnic and religious groups such as the Crimean Tatars and those who express opposition to the illegal annexation of the peninsula. In detention centres, these victims have been mistreated and tortured to punish or to extort "confessions". It is no coincidence that Russia continues to ignore calls in General Assembly Resolutions for the High

Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Crimea.

Madam President,

The United Kingdom is also deeply concerned by the ongoing militarisation of Crimea and the Sea of Azov by the Russian Federation. In December last year the General Assembly adopted a new resolution calling on the Russian Federation to withdraw its military forces from Crimea and Russia has ignored this.

Only three months ago, the Russian Federation used force to seize three Ukrainian naval vessels and took 24 servicemen captive – including three who were severely injured during the incident. Russia's use of force, including use of firearms against Ukraine's vessels, constituted clear aggression and escalation. These unacceptable actions are not in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and they have no basis in international law.

We cannot and will not ignore such a serious challenge to the international rules based order. We call on the international community to continue to stand united and remain focused on Russia's behavior and attempts to consolidate its illegal annexation of Crimea.

Madam President,

Turning to eastern Ukraine, the conflict there remains volatile, fueled by Russia's total disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia has incited and then supported military activity by armed formations, including through the deployment of Russian troops into Ukrainian territory. Russia's refusal to allow the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to carry out its mandate within non-government controlled territories gives the impression she has something to hide and it threatens both the security of Ukraine and the wider region.

Russia's concerted campaign to destabilise Ukraine includes its support, last November, for illegitimate elections that do not represent the will of the people in the non-government controlled territories. Such action unnecessarily fuels tension between parties to the conflict. Moreover, it is a clear breach of the Minsk Agreements.

Madam President,

As with all conflicts, it is sadly the civilians that suffer the most. Since the fighting started, over 10,000 people have lost their lives, almost 25,000 have been injured, 3.4 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and there are around 1.5 million internally displaced persons.

Ukraine's crisis is not a frozen conflict. Russia created this conflict and, rather than use its considerable influence to ensure Russian-backed armed formations comply with their Minsk commitments, Russia continues to supply weaponry and personnel to these armed formations. Russia needs to withdraw its military personnel and weapons, cease its support for the armed formations and abide by the Minsk Agreement commitments she signed up to.

This would be a much more convincing way to demonstrate commitment to 'the principles of the founding charter that governs the behaviour of the international community' than by giving a press conference.

Madam President,

The United Kingdom once again calls on the international community to stand united behind Ukraine and oppose Russia's continued attempts to destabilise another Member State of the UN, undermine her sovereignty and steal her territory.

Thank you.

[Press release: Joint statement on behalf of Prime Minister May and President Juncker](#)



Their discussions covered:

- which guarantees could be given with regard to the backstop that underline once again its temporary nature and give the appropriate legal assurance to both sides. Both reconfirmed their commitment to avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and to respect the integrity of the EU's internal market and of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister acknowledged the EU's position and notably the letter sent by President Tusk and President Juncker on 14 January. She welcomed the continued engagement of Task Force 50 with her team;
- the role alternative arrangements could play in replacing the backstop in future, where they tasked the Commission's Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier and Secretary of State Stephen Barclay with considering the process the European Commission and the UK will follow; and
- whether additions or changes to the Political Declaration can be made that are consistent with the EU and UK Government positions and increase confidence in the focus and ambition of both sides in delivering the future partnership envisaged as soon as possible. The Commission's Chief

Negotiator and the Secretary of State will follow up.

The two leaders agreed that talks had been constructive, and they urged their respective teams to continue to explore the options in a positive spirit. They will review progress again in the coming days, seized of the tight timescale and the historic significance of setting the EU and the UK on a path to a deep and unique future partnership.

President Juncker and Prime Minister May agreed to talk again before the end of the month.

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