

## [News story: Scottish Secretary travels to Iceland to boost Scottish trade links](#)

Scottish Secretary David Mundell is in Iceland today [Friday 8 February] on a short visit to build trade links between the country and Scotland.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, Mr Mundell will use his visit to Iceland to strengthen and grow Scotland-Iceland business relationships.

Mr Mundell will visit biotech company Ossur, the HB Grandi Fish processing plant and the University of Iceland. He will also meet the Icelandic fishing minister. The Secretary of State will be the guest of honour at an LGBT diversity reception at the British Embassy in Reykjavík, celebrating the UK and Iceland's shared commitment to LGBT rights.

Speaking ahead of his visit, Mr Mundell said:

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, it is vital that we do all we can to promote trade with partners, both old and new, around the world. Scotland and Iceland have strong cultural, academic and economic connections, and I look forward to building on these with my trip this week. I will be promoting Scottish business and skills – particularly in fishing and biotech – and I hope we will be able to further develop those relationships in the future.

The UK and Iceland are significant partners, with trade between the two countries worth around £1.5 billion in the year to September 2018, and Icelandic companies have a number of high-tech and asset investments in the UK. In addition, both Scotland and Iceland have strong fishing and fish processing industries.

Iceland and the UK share a number of international interests, including on security, climate change and human rights. Some 320,000 UK nationals visit Iceland every year, including on direct flights from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

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## [Speech: Reaching a proportionate way forward on Security Council action on](#)

## Kosovo

Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you particularly to the Special Representative for his briefing and the thanks of the United Kingdom to his team for their continuing dedication to this issue. I also extend a welcome to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Serbia and Her Excellency the Ambassador of Kosovo.

Mr President, I've spent a lot of my career dealing with the Balkans. I've spent some time in Kosovo and I've also spent it in Mitrovica, which is the northern part of Kosovo. The Kosovo-Serbs are the majority community. It is fair to say that there are still tensions in the communities and it is also fair to say that the communities have not always treated each other with kindness and with respect and with friendliness.

But I was sorry to hear today, Mr President, from one of the speakers: no recognition of the events that led us to 1999, to the NATO intervention and to Resolution 1244 and the UNMIK presence in Kosovo that we are dealing with today. No contrition. No acceptance of the enormity of the war crimes that were committed on the ground - war crimes that have been determined by the international tribunal, that this Council set up for that purpose. And no recognition of the events that led up to the Ahtisaari process on the status of Kosovo. And the events that then followed that and the attempts not only by this Council but also by individual members of this Council – notably the United States and Russia – acting with the European Union to try and resolve the status issue.

Mr President, all these efforts came to nothing and remain in abeyance. This is not at all to take away from the fact that each of the communities in Kosovo could do more to build a tolerant, inclusive society where rights are respected across the board. But there is a very different thing between that point and the description of how we got to where we are.

That said, the situation in Kosovo in 2019 has changed dramatically since UNMIK entered in 1999. UNMIK has played an important role – with the help of the European Union and NATO – in promoting security, stability and human rights in Kosovo and the region. Kosovo is no longer a country in conflict and it is becoming increasingly integrated into the international community.

This Council, Mr President, deals with very many important issues of international peace and security. With the agreement we have been able to reach today, on the reduction in the frequency of UNMIK sessions going forward, followed by the President of the Council – so thank you, Mr President, for your role in this. With this agreement to reduce the number of meetings in the Council, we have taken a proportionate step to the sort of issue Kosovo is. Enabling the Council to focus its efforts on much more fierce, intractable and live conflicts. At the same time, Mr President, we do support a strategic review of the UNMIK mission to ensure that UNMIK's efforts are tailored fully to the situation on the ground.

Mr President, as the UNMIK report makes clear, and notwithstanding developments overall in Kosovo, sadly tensions between Belgrade and Pristina have risen over the reporting period. And I think it's incumbent on all of us, Mr President, to look forward to potential solutions and for political leaders in the region – but particularly in Kosovo and Serbia – to refrain from exacerbating tensions and divisions.

Mr President, I referred a few minutes ago to the fact that Kosovo is not an acute crisis situation of the sort that the Council sadly all too often has to deal with. Rather it and Serbia are fortunate in that the European Union has offered a dialogue within which they can normalize their relations and they can make progress towards integration into the European Union as equals and sovereign and respecting each other.

There are other conflicts, Mr President, where we have no such prospect of any sort of agreement on those lines. And I really would like to use this session to appeal to the political leaders in Belgrade and Pristina to recognise the opportunity that the EU-facilitated dialogue offers them: to be able to resolve their differences and move forward for the sake of their peoples, for the sake of their history, for the sake of their relations, as equal and sovereign neighbors working together for the prosperity and democracy of Europe. And in addition to that, I look to both parties to cease all provocations which increase tensions and to call on them to show the good faith that the dialogue expects.

Progress on the dialogue is not only vital for the prosperity of both Kosovo and Serbia and the wider region, for its stability and its security. It would be a very important example of how at a very unpredictable time in world affairs, two former adversaries could come together and show that a way forward can be found. To mutual – I stress this Mr President – to mutual benefit. I want to say that we also welcome the law mandating the Kosovo state delegation which passed its first reading on 2 February. The state delegation, in the context of the dialogue, will help ensure that a plurality of voices from across the political spectrum is able to deliver a deal that the Kosovo Parliament and the country can accept. And of course any deal should be comprehensive, inclusive and contribute to regional stability and security.

I'd just like, if I may, Mr President, to highlight one aspect of the Special Representative's report to which the Kosovo Ambassador alluded. And this is the transition of the Kosovan security forces which this Council discussed in December. And I'd like to reiterate what I said at that time. The United Kingdom believes that it's Kosovo's right as an independent, self-governing state to develop its own armed forces. Our legal interpretation of UNSCR 1244 is that it does not – repeat not – contain anything that precludes the future transition of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force.

That said, Mr President, I repeat what I said in December: we look to Kosovo to act responsibly, transparently and in consultation with NATO Allies to uphold existing commitments to arrangements with the NATO force KFOR.

In closing Mr President, I'd like to again pay tribute to Council colleagues

who have helped us reach a sensible and proportionate way forward on the frequency with which this Council discusses Kosovo. And I'd like to reiterate our thanks the Special Representative and for his team on their efforts on behalf of this Council.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## **Speech: Education Secretary sets out five foundations to build character**

Thank you very much. Nigel [The Rev Nigel Genders] said how good it was to see so many of you many people here.

Talk about hard acts to follow. Thank you Sarah [The Rt Revd Sarah Mullally] for those very motivating words and I'd like to say a special thank you to The Rvd Rose [The Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin]. What she does every day is the only private moment in parliament. It's not broadcast. All of us across the House of Commons, of whatever party, stand together to remind ourselves why we are there.

Wow. What about these folk? These amazing young people from St Mark's Academy Mitcham and Archbishop Blanch School in Liverpool. I think we should take heart and a lot of optimism from them.

These songs could hardly have been more appropriate: 'This is me'; 'Lean on me'. This is the aspect of resilience that I want to talk to you about today.

Character and resilience in people. These are the qualities, the inner resources, that we call on to get us through the frustrations and setbacks that are part and parcel of life.

So how do we instil this in them [young people]? How do we make sure that they are ready to make their way in the world as robust and confident individuals?

Now, the Church of England knows a thing or two about character. It's one of the reasons your schools get such good results and 88% of them are rated good and outstanding.

Yours is one of the biggest names in education and in primary in particular.

There have been church schools even longer than state schools but now we are seeing a new development: with more and more Anglican schools converting to academy status, and the development of distinctive diocesan multi-academy trusts. And, I hope to see more talented people to come forward, through your parishes, to join in this development, as governors and trustees.

Albert Einstein once said: "Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong: it is character". But what do we mean by character?

Plenty of people have defined it in different and often complicated ways but I would like to suggest four pretty straightforward elements:

First you have to believe you can achieve. You have to be able to stick with the task in hand, and see a link between effort today and payback some time in the future, even if it's uncertain or rather a long way off. Finally, you need to develop the ability to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.

Those four things would also set you up to be a pretty good fraudster or bank robber. We want you to use strength of character to be good in the world and that is where virtues and values come in.

So character must be grounded in virtues, in strong values.

There has been almost as much debate about what virtues are, as there has about character.

Now one thing I'm not going to do is presume to tell the Church of England about virtues because I fear it would be unwise.

But I think the sort of things people have in mind are kindness, generosity, integrity, humility, tolerance and integrity.

You and I know that education is about more than just academic achievement, important though that is. It's about more than what happens in the classroom.

So how can we ensure that what young people become is the very best version of themselves they can be? How do we instil virtues? How do we build character?

One characteristic that is often attributed to those who have gone to public school is that they have a thing called 'public school confidence', a kind of 'have a go' assertiveness that you have from certain types of school.

Well this confidence is clearly not something that should be the prerogative of those whose parents are able to give them an expensive education. All children should have it. And very many do so. So where do we get it from?

Confidence comes from taking chances and seeing things work out; and it also comes from trying to do something – a project, an activity – until you get it right; it comes from learning ways to cope with whatever the task in hand is and it calls for bravery, gumption, maybe even a stubborn determination to succeed.

As has often been said, courage comes before confidence. Maybe you can't directly teach a child to be confident but you can certainly introduce them to opportunities, situations, where they need to be courageous.

And it is worth mentioning that courage, of course, takes many forms. One thing it is not, is the absence of fear. rather, it is doing things despite fear or trepidation. For some people standing up to speak in front of your classmates might be no less frightening for some than representing the school at a swimming tournament is for someone else. Now if you're lucky, success could be won on a game of chance.

But courage – to have tried and succeeded, or to have tried and failed, but to get back up again anyway – comes from within. Our job is to help young people find this courage.

In Angela Duckworth's book 'Grit' she says that one of the ways we can improve our chances of building up character is if we commit to 'one hard thing', which she defines as something that requires regular, deliberate practice. The important thing is that you picked your hard thing yourself and that you stick at it, you don't give up at the first experience of failure.

Because, actually, failure and disappointment aren't a bad thing – we'll all face them at some point in our lives. It is learning that the world hasn't ended, that builds the courage to go on.

And of course as parents we don't want our children to have the first experience of that in adulthood. To experience it now helps prepare them for the road ahead.

Character and a positive outlook are all intrinsically linked to employability. Ladies and gentlemen, we are more aware of mental health and wellbeing than we have ever been. And rightly so.

There have always been stresses and pressures with growing up. But for today's young people there are also new and heightened pressures, partly due to the evolution of technology and media. This is also closely related to character and resilience In Children's Mental Health Week this agenda has never been more important.

Young people can be vulnerable to the effects of social media: and the adverse, artificial impression of curated and altered images, the kind of visual enhancement which depicts people with perfect lives and perfect bodies.

Material on eating disorders, self-harm, even suicide, is so much more readily accessible than even 10 years ago to children who may already be in a vulnerable phase.

Then there are the different considerations around deeply immersive gaming and even with good old television, the arrival of binge watching, and the shift from lean-back group consumption, to anytime lean-forward, head-phones-in lone consumption.

Of course there is good to be had from these technologies and media as well. But, every hour of screen time is an hour not playing out, not reading, or not sleeping. Time spent making virtual choices is time not the same as making real life choices, with real world successes and failures to

comprehend, but there can often be real life consequences.

Research is constantly changing our understanding of how technology affects young people. Last week a study linked excessive screen time with slow child development; a study from Prince's Trust this week finds that half of young people say social media makes them feel anxious about the future.

There is more research out today from the Chief Medical Officer. I want social media companies to do more in the interests of the next generation. That starts with the removal of content that may promote suicide and self-harm. But they must go further. Inside these companies are truly brilliant minds working out how to entice us to use their technology more. One of the strongest hooks they are using for our attention is the fear of missing out, of constant comparison and I'm afraid the anxiety that goes with it.

I want that creative genius used for pro social ends. My colleagues at the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office will set out a range of measures to tackle online harms and set clear responsibilities for tech companies to keep our young people safe.

DCMS will also be allocating £100,000 to improve our understanding of how to address youth loneliness and I will come on to some of the ways my department will be supporting this initiative shortly.

Now of course, for schools character development is an important aspect of their role and for so very many it is a very prominent part of what they do. Very many schools already deliver a rich and varied programme of activities both within the curriculum and out of school hours.

And we are supporting these activities in schools.

- Thanks to our network of 120 music hubs throughout the country more than 700,000 children in state-funded schools are being taught to play a musical instrument;
- The primary PE premium is worth £16,000 per school for larger schools;
- Around 500,000 young people, aged between 15 and 17 have taken part in the National Citizen Service programme since it began. It's a programme funded by government and designed to help shape more confident, capable and engaged young people;
- The £40m #iwill fund (jointly funded by DCMS and the National Lottery Community Fund) has attracted 20 match funders who have contributed a further £26.5 million to date, enabling more than 300,000 young people to become involved in social action;
- The Cadet Expansion Programme is increasing the total number of Cadet Units in schools to 500 is also providing the brilliant cadet experience for thousands of children;
- And, in recognition of all this work, the EEF has now funded trials of 15 projects with a focus on character and essential life skills, to promote evidence based interventions.

There are great opportunities out there. As you know, schools have a duty to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their

pupils.

This is done throughout the school day through things like RE lessons but also by reinforcing or encouraging pupils' self-belief and self worth.

Take St Mary of Charity CofE Primary School which I visited recently. It's part of Aquila, the Diocese of Canterbury Academies Trust. It had been rated 'inadequate' before joining the trust and is now 'outstanding' with a strong school ethos focusing on perseverance and resilience. I asked one 10-year-old what resilience meant and she told me in a very straightforward way: "It's just believing in yourself, really, isn't it?". The pupils, all of whom are an absolute credit to the school, were keen, enthusiastic, willing to try new things.

It's at school that pupils will learn how to stand on the shoulders of giants, those individuals with stories of inspiration and courage from all corners of the curriculum: from RE, from history, from literature.

You learn a lot from Atticus Finch, as you do from Ghandi, Shackleton or Helen Keller; as indeed you do from the lessons in the Bible and the holy books of the other great world religions. Values and virtues are not temporary; they don't pass. They become part of every child you teach.

We are also putting positive personal attributes at the heart of our Relationships Education. Treating yourself and others well is the core of having good relationships.

And again I want to thank Nigel and the Church of England for the help you have given us. For those children who have the odds stacked against them from the outset, developing character strengths can be even more beneficial, even more important.

The Social Mobility Commission is currently researching how extracurricular activities, networks and the development of so-called soft skills can influence social mobility, as well as some of the solutions for tackling this.

I am keen to get the results of this research to take further steps on behalf of those children who aren't getting the rich range of cultural experiences they need.

Last month I announced a programme to bolster exchanges and foreign trips for disadvantaged children, to improve language skills but also to build independence, character and resilience.

I also know that some fantastic work is being done with the pupil premiums. Take Northern Saints CofE School for example, which has a much higher-than-average number of pupils on free school meals. They used some of their £300,000 annual pupil premium funding to run nine residential programmes with the Outward Bound Trust, focusing in particular on their disadvantaged children.

I would also like to urge those private schools, which are blessed with great



facilities to do more to share them, to make them available to others so that the entire community can benefit.

And there is more we can do together. I want to make sure every child gets to build up their character and resilience by testing themselves from a range of enjoyable activities.

This is about being generally better equipped for life but I also suggest this subject of character and resilience, while it's not the same as employability skills is closely related. These are things employers increasingly say they need more of.

These activities don't have to be a result of physical exertion. They can just as easily be something you do at school or at home or in an office that isn't a hobby.

I have heard repeatedly from teachers, parents and young people themselves about the areas of activity which will help develop character and resilience. All of them combine elements that will stretch and challenge and will help young people think, develop and grow and which will enhance their self-esteem and confidence. I wanted to distil this long list into something manageable so we have grouped these into five subsets – the five foundations for building character.

We have grouped them into five subsets:

- First, there's SPORT – traditional, competitive team sports and a wide range of other physical activities.
- Next CREATIVITY – which features all kinds of thoughtful and inventive activities, as well as traditional creative ones such as: art, design, creative writing and composing music;
- Third is PERFORMING – which emphasises more expressive activities for individuals or in a group including: drama, theatre, dance, playing in an orchestra or singing in a choir, public speaking and debating;
- The fourth category is VOLUNTEERING & MEMBERSHIP – through voluntary youth groups, campaigns of particular interest to the young, or school-based initiatives, as well as structured programmes like Duke of Edinburgh, or uniformed groups like the Cadets, Scouts and Guides. It also includes voluntary work, which dovetails to our final category...
- Which is WORLD OF WORK – from learning about careers and entrepreneurialism, to actual work experience or a Saturday job.

I am delighted that the new Ofsted Framework is going to place clear importance on personal development and positive attitudes.

Inspectors will evaluate the extent to which schools support pupils to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy.

A separate behaviour judgement will assess whether schools are creating a calm, well-managed environment free from bullying.

This emphasises, lest there be any doubt, that clearly schools aren't just about qualifications. We need greater co-ordination to increase awareness of all these opportunities available.

I do want to make clear that I'm not piling on extra chores to a school's to-do list. What I'm asking for is a joined up effort from the entire community.

We all have an interest in making sure that young people grow up resilient, resourceful and confident in their abilities. It's not something we can subcontract to schools.

Now, the information on the activities available can be confusing for schools which is why, following a roundtable held on the development of the schools sport action plan, the Government will explore how to make it easier.

This will include looking at how to support schools and sports governing bodies to link up and find out what is available in each local area for pupils to embrace. There will then be further work looking at how to signpost schools with other local opportunities, such as entrepreneurship programmes, digital after-school activities, public speaking and debating workshops.

A number of very long-established organisations have also been making a massive contribution to developing character for decades.

In the case of the Scouts, for 111 years. The Chief Scout Bear Grylls says that character "is what's left when you strip away everything else. It's who you really are."

Right now there are 640,000 members of the Scouts, who have seen 13 years of consecutive growth. There were over 500,000 members of the Guides at the last count in 2017 and growth is constrained not by lack of interest, rather a need for adult volunteers. Both have big waiting lists to join.

I am particularly pleased to know that DCMS is running the Uniformed Youth Fund to create 6,000 new places in uniformed youth groups in deprived areas of England and to research how membership can address youth loneliness and isolation.

The numbers participating in the Duke of Edinburgh award are also rising. Almost 276,000 starting it last year, which is up 1.7% on the previous year.

What these numbers clearly show is that there is huge appetite and enthusiasm for organisations, which can deliver 5 foundation activities.

I want to make sure that we embed these 5 foundations as widely as possible. In schools character developed is much more than the extracurricular.

It all starts with good teaching. I know I hardly need to tell you this. Good teaching can be as good for character as it is for academic attainment.

Good schools reinforce good character development through a common and consistent language: in the way the school shows itself to the outside world, as Rose reminded us, in the expectations, in school assemblies, in open days,

in contact with parents.

Homework and projects play a role in drawing on independence and stickability. I do realise it's always going to be an uphill struggle to convince pupils that exams are a good thing, especially if one doesn't go well, but this is where the really important life lessons lie. Failure isn't the end. For some, it's the kick-start that they need.

This is not about a DfE plan for building character. It has to be about schools learning from other schools, it's about business pitching in when it can, it's about community groups speaking up and inviting schools in. It's about individual adults volunteering. All of us need to work together, using the wide range of resources and experts that there are out there.

I am going to be assembling an advisory group on how we can best support schools in their work to build character. This group will be made up of leaders and experts in their field, and will engage with people from the arts, sport, the voluntary sector and of course schools. The group will report recommendations in September with a view to implementing next year.

One key area that I want the group to focus on will be developing a set of benchmarks for schools to use so that they can deliver their own approach to developing character and assess themselves on how they are doing.

We already have something similar for careers guidance called the Gatsby Benchmarks. I want the advisory group to work up something similar for character.

We know that many schools have already taken a thoughtful and strategic approach to character education, drawing on the evidence and deciding how their own ethos, curriculum and wider offer to pupils – including delivering these 5 foundations – can best build character. I want all schools to be able to go through this thinking and planning.

The new benchmarks will give senior leadership teams a framework to help. And we will also be working closely with other departments in government such as DCMS and my colleague Mims Davies, who leads on youth and sport, on how we enable local partners and organisation to work with schools to make more opportunities available for young people.

We are also exploring how schools could be recognised or accredited for the work they have done in this area. I know that the Association of Character Education is doing some very interesting developments in this space.

Finally, I want to recognise some of the great practice that is already going on out there in schools and I plan to shortly reintroduce the National Character Awards which were started by my colleague Nicky Morgan. These will celebrate school programmes that develop a wide range of character traits including conscientiousness, drive and perseverance; virtues like neighbourliness and actions like service to your community, where even something small can have a huge impact on people who live there.

Ladies and gentleman, I'd like to finish today by saying that when I go to

visit schools, I don't recognise this word snowflakes.

I don't recognise that in the young people I meet on my visits. The young people I meet are compassionate, civic minded and hard working. I know that there are 200 of them here today. I'd like to congratulate and thank you for coming here today.

When I compare you and your peers to who I was at your age, my classmates and I, you have so much more confidence, ambition and gumption than we ever did. But of course we'd expect every generation to be better than the last. What I want is for us to reach higher and wider, to improve further still. To make sure that these opportunities are available for everyone and that we value fully the development of character and resilience in all our young people.

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## [News story: New ministerial champion to back jobs, growth and opportunity in Salisbury](#)

Business Minister Lord Henley has been appointed Ministerial Champion for Salisbury, providing local leaders with a single point of contact in the heart of government as the local area focuses on boosting business following the nerve agent attack last year.

The news comes as Lord Henley today met Wiltshire Council, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) and local businesses while seeing recovery efforts first-hand (Thursday 7 February) during a 2-day visit to South Wiltshire.

Lord Henley received a briefing from Wiltshire Council on the Salisbury Recovery Programme during a visit to the Guildhall. He then walked down the High Street to hear from businesses directly impacted by the incident that have been supported with government funding, including:

- Zizzi, a restaurant which re-opened in November having been given the all-clear following decontamination work
- Smith England, an independent hair salon
- Pritchett's, an independent family-run butchers

He then visited The Tintometer, one of the region's most innovative businesses, supplying water analysis equipment for the leisure, environmental and industrial sectors to understand their perspective on local challenges and opportunities. The company now employs more than 370 employees and delivers products and customer service to customers in 160 countries.

During a visit to the Porton Down Science Park tomorrow, Lord Henley will

meet with John Glen MP, Wiltshire Council and Dstl representatives to hear about their plans for the future development of the Science Park. He then met with Wiltshire Council and the SWLEP to discuss progress towards developing a local Industrial Strategy to boost growth across the region.

Last year the government announced more than £7.5 million of funding to boost businesses, tourism and support the local community as a result of the incidents in Salisbury and Amesbury. The government is committed to supporting this historic British city as it recovers and will continue to do everything possible to help keep South Wiltshire and its businesses thriving.

There is now only one remaining site of decontamination to bring back into safe use, at Christie Miller Road. While this work is ongoing, our focus also remains on ensuring a prosperous local community in Salisbury and the wider region.

Wider government investment in the SWLEP area includes nearly £170 million worth of Growth Deals, supporting 26 projects and programmes including skills support at Wiltshire College, Salisbury and the redevelopment of central Salisbury.

Business Minister Lord Henley said:

As the newly appointed Ministerial Champion for Salisbury I look forward to supporting efforts to ensure this great Cathedral city of commerce, culture and character continues to thrive.

As Salisbury gets back to business, the government is working hand-in-hand with local leaders to deliver an ambitious local Industrial Strategy for the area, ensuring Salisbury not only recovers, but leads the way in some of the industries of the future.

Alistair Cunningham, chair of the South Wiltshire recovery coordinating group, said:

We welcome Lord Henley to South Wiltshire and are pleased to have the continued support from central government in helping Salisbury and South Wiltshire to move forward.

South Wiltshire is looking to the future, and working closely with the government will deliver economic regeneration and cultural improvements to the city.

A long-term programme has been developed to re-position Salisbury and improve the offer for residents, visitors and tourists.

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# Speech: Strengthening collaboration and operational co-operation with Western Balkans Customs Administrations

It's a great pleasure to welcome you all to the third High-Level Informal Regional Meeting of General Directors of Customs Administration of the Western Balkans Six, and the first to be held in Montenegro.

The British Government thanks all six of the Western Balkans Customs Administrations for supporting and participating in this format which has evolved to encourage closer working between the Customs Administrations in order to assist greater facilitation of trade in the region. In particular I'd like to recognise the support of our hosts, Director General Joković and his team.

I'm conscious that we are meeting three days after International Customs Day on 26 January, which recognizes the contribution and achievements of Customs officers around the world, including colleagues working at borders and ensuring connectivity, often in difficult conditions, and is an opportunity to consolidate and enhance co-operation amongst Customs Administrations. This event is a great example of the sort of co-operation which International Customs Day seeks to highlight.

As we celebrate the work that Customs officers do to facilitate security and inter-connectivity, it is important to remember that the inter-connected nature of the modern world is itself an excellent enabler for today's criminal networks.

High-Level Informal Regional Meeting of General Directors of Customs Administration of the Western Balkans Six

The British Government has been committed to working with Customs Administrations across the region for several years with a particular focus on tackling the common threat posed by serious organised crime. The British Government values the collaboration and co-operation our HMRC officers share with you and your staff on a daily basis.

The 2018 Western Balkans London Summit has provided an important opportunity to recognise these relationships, and to further strengthen these links.

- The British Government will double the number of British diplomats working on shared security issues in the region, including the deployment of further HMRC officers.
- Funding for customs-related activity in the Western Balkans will increase to over €1 million in the coming financial year, and HMRC will continue to support this initiative in the most effective ways possible.

- The UK will also work with all relevant stakeholders to implement the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information Sharing, which was signed by the Ministers of Interior and Security from across the region after the London Summit.
- Podgorica hosted the first Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group in November 2018. The Steering Group recognised the work of this Customs Group and it was agreed that the Customs platform should be used as a template for further future exchanges, and to form an illicit finances group to look at improved sharing of spontaneous information / intelligence. The UK is a strong supporter of the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information Sharing. We recognise that in itself it does not provide all the answers, however it is an important commitment from the Western Balkans and provides a good framework for further co-operation and information and intelligence sharing.

There will no doubt be issues of policy and legislation that may have to be reviewed back at our respective capitals. This should not deter you, indeed it they may create fresh opportunities for providing dialogue between policy and operational staff. There is a duty upon those responsible for either operations or policy, to ensure that we work together to the best of our abilities to arm front-line officers, intelligence and investigation staff with timely data, information and intelligence, enabling them to best utilise our resources and inform operational decision making.

Since your first meeting in June 2018 in Tirana, good progress has been made after you mandated your Operational Assistant Directors to discuss ways of for Customs Administrations in the region to better share spontaneous information and intelligence to help combat customs fraud. The recommendations your Assistant Directors agreed in Veles in October 2018, will be presented to you today for discussion.

I wish you every success with your discussions and look forward to hearing the results. Thank you.