

Secretary of State unveils Northern Ireland Platinum Jubilee hamper at Balmoral Show

The Platinum Jubilee Hamper, created in partnership with Food NI, was officially unveiled by Secretary of State Brandon Lewis in the NI Food Pavilion during today's (Thursday 12 May) Balmoral Show. The hamper brings together products belonging to over 50 local food and drink producers from across Northern Ireland. The project will see exclusive hampers filled with top quality fare gifted as a gesture of thanks to Her Majesty for her 70 years of service to the United Kingdom.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP said:

"I'm delighted to be at the Balmoral Show to unveil this fantastic Platinum Jubilee Hamper, showcasing Northern Ireland's top quality food and drink, as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

"As we continue to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's 70 years of unparalleled service, I hope that she and her family will enjoy this special gift, which represents the appreciation of the people of Northern Ireland during this landmark year.

"I'd like to thank Food NI and Northern Ireland companies for working with us to deliver this unique initiative."

Minister of State Conor Burns MP, who recently visited hamper contributors including Sawers Deli, said:

"The Platinum Jubilee hamper is a unique opportunity to highlight Northern Ireland's world-class produce while celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's dedication to people across the United Kingdom.

"Having recently visited some of the firms contributing to the hamper, I know the care and pride they take in creating their produce, and I'm proud that Her Majesty will receive such a top quality gift from Northern Ireland during her Jubilee year."

Food NI Chief Executive Michele Shirlow said:

"Food NI is delighted to be involved in delivering the Platinum Jubilee Hamper. It has been a fantastic opportunity to showcase the quality, award winning local food and drink Northern Ireland has to offer.

"This celebration hamper includes a range of food and drink, some of Northern Ireland's household favourites, and some brand new innovative products.

"Food and drink from our single biggest manufacturing industry, and we are very proud that Northern Ireland was awarded World Best Food Destination in

2018 at World Travel Market. Our Food, Power of Good.”

The Platinum Jubilee hampers will be sent to Her Majesty and the Royal Households later this month.

- For a full list of producers contributing to the Platinum Jubilee Hamper, please see below:

Art on a Tin, Baked in Belfast, Ballylisk of Armagh, Baronscourt Brewing Company, Bro Coffee, Brighter Gold, Cavanagh Free Range Eggs, Clements Eggs, Corndale Farm, Corries Butchers, Crawford's Rock Seaweed Company, Dundarave, Earth Rainbow, Erin Grove Preserves, French Village, Gilfresh, Glens of Antrim Potatoes, Gracehill Fine Foods, Granny Shaws Fudge Factory, Grannys Fayre, Green Fingers Family, Hellbent, Hotties Chocolate, Indie Fudge, Irish Black Butter, Island Dairies, KeNako Biltong, Kettle Irish Foods, Lakeland Dairies, Long Meadow Cider, Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative, Mash Direct, McCrackens Brewery, Milgro, Millbank Farm, Mourne Dew, Natural Umber, NearyNógs, Noisy Snacks, Papas Mineral Company, PEPPUP, Radox, Rooney Fish, S.D.Bell & Co, Sawers, SCOTTS, Sea Source, Seaview Farms, Shortcross Gin, Suki Tea Makers, Tasty Grub Club, The Belfast Coffee Co., The Chocolate Manor, Wild Atlantic Distillery, Wilson's Country, Hinch Distillery.

Minister Quince Oral Statement on children's social care review

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will now make a statement on how the Government is responding to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) Children's Social Care report.

This Government believes in a country where all children are given an equal chance to fulfil their potential, but sadly we are not there yet. It is for this reason that we made our manifesto commitment to launch the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in March 2021, which was [published](#) today.

This was commissioned to take a fundamental look at the children's social care system, and to understand how we must transform it to better support the most vulnerable children and families.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Josh MacAlister and his team for this comprehensive review, as well as the children, the Experts by Experience Board and the care leavers, families and carers who shared their experiences of the current system and aspirations for a future one.

The Review is bold and broad, calling for a reset of the system so that it acts decisively in response to abuse; provides more help to families in

crisis; and ensures those in care have lifelong loving relationships and homes.

I look forward to working with the sector, those with first-hand experience and with colleagues on all sides of the House, to inform an ambitious and detailed Government response and implementation strategy, to be published before the end of 2022.

To get us there, I have three main priorities:

1. The first is to improve the child protection system so that it keeps children safe from harm as effectively as possible.
2. The second is to support families to care for their children, so that they can have safe, loving and happy childhoods which set them up for fulfilling lives.
3. And the third is to ensure that there are the right placements for children in the right places, so that those who cannot stay with their parents grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

To enable me to respond effectively and without delay, I will establish a National Implementation Board, of people with experience of leading transformational change, to challenge the system to achieve the full extent of our ambitions for children. The Board will also consist of people with their own experience of the care system to remind us of the promise of delivery and the cost of delay.

Mr Speaker, I want to be straight: too many vulnerable children have been let down by the system. We cannot level up if we cannot make progress on children's social care reform. But we are striving to change this and our work to improve the life chances of children is already well underway – aligning with the key themes of the Review and CMA report.

On 2nd April, we backed the [Supporting Families](#) programme with £695 million – which will mean 300,000 of the most vulnerable families will be supported to provide the safe and loving homes their children need to thrive. We welcome the Review's recognition of this programme as an excellent model of family intervention.

And today, with the review as our roadmap, we are going further:

We will work with the sector to develop a National Children's Social Care Framework, which will set a clear direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence for how to support children and families. We will set out more detail later this year.

I want to pay tribute to every single social worker striving to offer life changing support to children and families day in, day out. Providing more decisive child protection relies upon the knowledge and skills of these social workers – which is why I support the principle of the review's proposed Early Career Framework. We will set out robust plans to refocus the support social workers receive early on – with a particular focus on child protection given the challenging nature of this work.

We will also take action to drive forward the review's three data and digital priority areas, ensuring local government and partners are in the driving seat of reform. Following the review's recommendation for a data and technology taskforce, we will introduce a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology. More detail will follow later this year on joining up data from across the public sector so that we can increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and the wider public.

And, recognising the urgency of action in placement sufficiency, we will prioritise working with local authorities to recruit more foster carers. This will include pathfinder local recruitment campaigns that build towards a national programme, to help ensure children have access to the right placements at the right time. As the review recommends, we will focus on providing more support throughout the application process to improve the conversion rate from expressions of interest to approved foster carers.

Delivering change for vulnerable children is my absolute priority and, as suggested by the review, I will return to this House on the anniversary of its publication to update colleagues on progress made.

Mr Speaker, this statement also provides an opportunity to welcome the recommendations set out in the Competition and Markets Authority report into the children's social care market, published in March. As an initial response, I have asked my department to conduct thorough research into the children's homes workforce, engaging with the sector and experts to improve oversight of the market.

Sadly, we know that too many children are still not being protected from harm quickly enough. This is unacceptable. On Thursday, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel will set out lessons learnt from the heart-breaking deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Secretary of State for Education will come to this House to outline the Government's initial response to these tragic cases.

Mr Speaker, for too long children's social care has not received the focus it so desperately needs and deserves. I am determined to work with colleagues across the House and with local authorities across the country to deliver once in a generation reform, so that the system provides high quality help, at the right time, with tangible outcomes.

For every child who needs our protection – we must reform this system.

For every family who needs our help and support – we must reform this system.

For every child or young person in care who deserves a safe, stable and loving home – we must reform this system.

This is a moral imperative, and we must all rise to the challenge.

I commend this statement to the House.

Calling all gamers: check your pay

From this week, gamers playing Angry Birds, The Sims, FIFA, Sugar Blast and others, will be targeted by adverts calling on workers to check they are being paid properly following the annual increase in the minimum wage.

With younger workers among those set to benefit most from the rise, the department has widened its reach in this demographic by targeting gamers. A 15 second animation during game play will remind players of the higher rates with a link to the [check your pay page](#).

Known as reward video, the adverts will run during natural pauses in the game play and players will be incentivised to watch the entire video to gain an in-game reward such as coins, points, or extra lives – for example receiving an extra ‘bird’ when playing Angry Birds.

The National Minimum Wage rates increased on 1 April, which included the largest ever rise to the National Living Wage to £9.50 per hour. The uplift is one of the many ways the government is supporting people with the rising costs of living, while growing our economy and boosting jobs as the best solution in the long term.

Labour Markets Minister Paul Scully said:

Put simply, this is real life, not The Sims – and businesses need to pay their staff the legal rate following the minimum wage uplift, to pass on the extra coins.

We’re taking action with mobile game adverts to ensure UK workers know how to check their pay and make sure they aren’t being short-changed.

The wider campaign, already underway, encourages workers to check their pay packets by reminding them that all workers are legally entitled to be paid the National Minimum Wage.

Messaging includes encouraging workers to check their hourly rate of pay, and to also check for any deductions or unpaid working time. Workers can speak to their employer, contact ACAS or complain to HMRC if they believe they are being underpaid.

The uplift in the National Minimum Wage rates, which took place on 1 April, is set to benefit around 2.5 million people, with the National Living Wage meaning that a full-time worker earns £1,000 more per year.

The adverts will be run via Venatus, an agency representing some of the biggest gaming and entertainment publishers, reaching a wide audience across

the UK.

UKHSA expands support to help countries identify emerging variants

One year on from its launch, the New Variant Assessment Platform (NVAP) will continue expanding its work to other countries and regions worldwide to help global health security efforts.

Nine countries and territories have now received direct support from NVAP to improve early detection of variants, putting the world in a stronger position to respond to newly emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2.

[Set up a year ago](#) and led by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), NVAP helps enhance global efforts to combat coronavirus (COVID-19) by giving international access to the UK's world-leading sequencing and virus assessment expertise.

The UK is uniquely positioned to help address global sequencing capability gaps.

The UK total of 2.7 million SARS-CoV-2 genomes uploaded to the international [GISAID](#) database is the largest total of any country after the US, and accounts for approximately a quarter of all sequences uploaded globally.

Through NVAP, UKHSA is already working with:

- Brazil
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Chile
- Trinidad and Tobago
- The Cayman Islands
- Singapore

NVAP boosts existing capacity and technical expertise on genomic sequencing for countries and territories. It has provided sequencing reagents and kits for many international partners, facilitated scientific exchanges with UKHSA experts and conducted structured training on bioinformatics, characterisation of variants, risk assessment and advice on biological assessment on variants.

The programme is a significant example of the UK's contribution to the World Health Organization's (WHO) global genomic surveillance 10-year plan and works with other international partners to coordinate global efforts on

improving genomic sequencing worldwide.

Partnerships with individual countries are bespoke and based on the specific needs of the particular country, whether that be training of scientists, provision of supplies or equipment, expert advice on development of genomic sequencing systems, or arranging for samples to be sequenced in UK laboratories.

Dame Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of UKHSA said:

It has become increasingly clear that genomic surveillance is vital to help us detect and prepare for new health threats. Improving the world's ability to monitor and detect newly emerging pathogens is critical for global health security.

We are immensely proud of what NVAP has achieved so far and look forward to expanding its reach even further over the coming months and years.

Leena Inamdar, Global Health Lead Consultant at UKHSA and NVAP Programme Lead said:

It is fantastic to see what the New Variant Assessment Platform has achieved over the past year in providing practical support, training and surveillance expertise to so many places.

COVID-19 has taught us that no nation is safe until every nation is safe, and through NVAP we are helping to strengthen surveillance systems across the world. We are excited to continue this work in the next phase of the programme.

Over the coming year, NVAP will continue to work with the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region to improve regional genomic sequencing hubs in Oman, Abu Dhabi and Morocco.

It will also continue to work with WHO South-East Asia, WHO Europe, Africa Centres for Disease Control and the Caribbean Public Health Agency to provide technical assistance, training and procurement of reagents. Further partnerships are in development and will be set out in due course.

[UKEF signs new export partnership with](#)

Saudi EXIM

Press release

UK Export Finance has today signed a cooperation agreement with the Saudi Arabian export credit agency, Saudi Export-Import Bank.



UK Export Finance (UKEF) has today signed a cooperation agreement with the Saudi Arabian export credit agency, Saudi Export-Import Bank ('Saudi Exim').

The agreement provides a general framework that will enable the two agencies to combine their financial support to help UK and Saudi Arabian businesses secure export contracts anywhere in the world.

UKEF can now support the export of products from Saudi Arabia through its collaboration with Saudi Exim where a transaction also involves substantial trading opportunities for UK exporters in third countries.

Saudi Exim was established in 2020 and is one of the world's newest export credit agencies, while UKEF was set up in 1919 as the world's first. Therefore, UKEF will share its knowledge and expertise with its Saudi counterpart to assist in its development as part of the strong diplomatic ties between both countries.

UK Export Finance CEO Louis Taylor said:

This partnership is a major boost to our trading relationship and to businesses in both countries. By working with other export credit agencies from around the world we can open doors to suppliers from other countries to contribute to international projects, making the projects even better and our offer even more attractive to overseas buyers.

We already have strong trading ties with Saudi Arabia, with both nations home to some of the world's leading companies. We are now working together to harness this expertise to create new export and

investment opportunities in other markets that benefit both economies.

Saudi Export-Import Bank CEO HE. Saad Alkhalb said:

Saudi Arabia is diversifying its exports capability and intensely as part of Vision 2030 strategy. The two countries are already working closely together to strengthen trade ties to support the growth in export.

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