

Press release: UK Aid opens refurbished hospital laboratory in Sierra Leone

Today the UK Government and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) will formally open a newly refurbished diagnostic laboratory at Connaught hospital in Freetown.

This is the third and final laboratory built with UK Aid that will be handed over to ministry leadership alongside 2 additional facilities in Makeni and Bo. A cohort of 15 Sierra-Leonean hospital staff has also been fully trained as technicians to work in the laboratories.

Funded by UK Aid and implemented by Public Health England (PHE) in partnership with MoHS, the project supports the country's public health capacity to detect and control the spread of high consequence infectious diseases like Ebola and Yellow Fever, using the latest diagnostic techniques.

In the same week, the newly trained technicians will graduate following completion of a PHE-led molecular virology training programme. Sierra Leone has a very limited number of doctors and nurses, and Ebola had a tragic impact on that already stretched capacity. The process of training new staff is an essential part of efforts to rebuild that capacity.

Several of the graduates have also undergone additional training which will allow them to train future cohorts in molecular diagnostic techniques to ensure this knowledge and skill-set is passed on, helping to sustain this critical capability for the long-term.

The laboratories are part of a broader UK programme of support which is helping to strengthen the Government of Sierra Leone's own capacity to better deal with serious future health outbreaks following the devastation caused by Ebola in 2014.

The premises include a fully equipped molecular facility which will allow the MoHS to test for a range of high consequence pathogens, with Ebola testing being specifically supported by the UK Aid-funded Resilient Zero programme.

A ceremony is being held at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown to mark the handing over of the completed building works from the UK Government to the ministry. The laboratories will be opened by HE Dr Abu Bakarr Fofanah, Minister of Health and Sanitation, Dr Brima Kargbo, Sierra Leone's Chief Medical Officer and HE Guy Warrington, British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone and Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive of PHE.

The refurbishment will create an environment where high-risk samples (such as those from suspected Ebola cases) can be tested safely, and will also allow the Government of Sierra Leone to further expand diagnostic capacity in other

areas for both infectious and non-infectious diseases, and thereby strengthening the public health system in Sierra Leone in the long-term.

Chief Medical Officer of Sierra Leone, Dr Brima Kargbo said:

The recognition of diseases through the laboratory system is the foundation of disease control and prevention. Therefore, accurate and timely laboratory services has become the bedrock upon which current disease treatment, prevention and control programmes are based. The reliance on laboratory-derived information has, for several years, been in line with the development of modern medicine and public health. At this stage we are grateful to the UK Government for their invaluable support in this direction.

British High Commissioner, Guy Warrington, who spoke at the launch, said:

I want to congratulate the Ministry of Health and Sanitation for the progress that has been made to renovate these facilities under their leadership. I also want to recognise the newly trained molecular lab technicians for their vital work in running these labs. On behalf of the UK Government I am proud that we were able to support this important work through UK Aid funding and with the valuable expertise provided by our colleagues at Public Health England. I look forward to these labs continuing to serve the people of Sierra Leone and helping keep them safe from infectious diseases for many years to come.

Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive of Public Health England said:

The people of Sierra Leone are hugely resilient and have coped with a huge amount of destruction and disease in recent years. I am proud of the part that PHE has played in working with the Sierra Leone government to help strengthen Sierra Leone's health system and grow the country's ability to protect itself against potentially devastating diseases.

In Sierra Leone alone, the Ebola outbreak killed around 4,000 people, with more than 8,700 cases confirmed. The recovery costs for the country have been estimated at \$844 million. Recently the country has also been tragically hit by mudslides, which killed over 500 people. The UK Public Health Rapid Support Team was deployed to tackle the prevention of potential cholera outbreaks following the mudslides.

The new public health capability, as well as the establishment of a national public health institute in Sierra Leone itself, are both positive results of the national and international learnings from the Ebola outbreak.

From January 2018 PHE begins a two-year ODA funded programme of supporting MoHS in developing public health infrastructure to meet International Health Regulations (IHR). The focus of the Sierra Leone element of the programme will be on long term sustainability of laboratories, and IHR capacity building integrated within health system strengthening.

- in Sierra Leone, the average lifespan is roughly half that of western nations and malnutrition ranks among the world's highest – poverty remains pervasive, particularly in the Eastern and Northern regions with more than 6 out of 10 people living on less than a euro a day
- in recent years, although Sierra Leone had a population of 7 million, there were only around 100 doctors and between 200 to 300 nurses in employment to respond to illness and disease
- as part of the Resilient Zero programme, over 300 local staff have been trained in emergency planning
- since the beginning of the year, 15 Sierra Leone MoHS laboratory technicians have been trained in molecular diagnostics at Bo and Makeni – all have completed a 6-week molecular virology practical courses which was followed by supervised working at PHE operated molecular laboratories.
- introduction into concepts of virology was provided through a short course held early 2017, and tutorials on broader concepts of infections accompanied the practical training
- PHE has had a presence in Sierra Leone since 2012, initially to assist with a cholera outbreak, but also played a vital role in working with DfID, WHO and the Sierra Leone MOHS to manage the Ebola outbreak; the UK Public Health Rapid Support team has also recently been deployed to Sierra Leone to assist with disease surveillance and help prevent outbreaks of infection following the tragic mudslides
- the UK has committed a £427 million package of support to help contain, control, treat, and ultimately prevent Ebola.

[News story: Typhoon Clipper and Alison report published](#)

MAIB's report on the collision between the high-speed catamaran Typhoon Clipper and the workboat Alison adjacent to Tower Millennium Pier, River Thames, London on 5 December 2016, is now published.

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

Press enquiries

Press enquiries during office hours 01932 440015

Press enquiries out of hours 020 7944 4292

[News story: HS2 train building to pave way for new era of British jobs](#)

- five world class companies shortlisted for £2.75 billion contract to build Britain's next generation of high speed trains
- Transport Secretary tells short-listed bidders they must show how they will boost jobs and skills
- hundreds of British jobs will be created with UK suppliers ready to benefit

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling today (1 November 2017) paved the way for a huge new UK train programme by telling bidders new HS2 trains must deliver jobs and skills in Britain.

HS2 Ltd will tomorrow (2 November 2017) name the 5 shortlisted firms seeking to win the multi-billion pound contract to build some of the fastest trains in the world.

The Transport Secretary told companies in the race to be awarded the £2.75 billion contract to show how "huge opportunities" for British workers will be provided in their bid to build Britain's fastest trains.

Chris Grayling said:

I am determined to see the great HS2 train building programme create huge opportunities for British workers and drive economic growth in our country.

Bidders need to push the boundaries and I want to see innovation and ambition in their plans to build the fastest trains in Britain – which I want to pave the way for a new generation of highly skilled British workers, boosting skills, generating employment and strengthening the manufacturing supply chain.

Britain's new railway will carry more than 300,000 people a day, improve connections between our great cities, free up space on our existing rail lines, generate jobs and help us build an economy that works for all. But it is crucial that the benefits of HS2 resonate far beyond the opening of the new railway.

The new 225 miles per hour trains will provide a world-class passenger experience, while also meeting the highest international standards for noise reduction and environmental sustainability.

Starting from 2026, the trains will bring the benefits of high speed rail not only to the core network between London and the West Midlands, but also onward to places like Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Preston and Wigan. The successful bidder will maintain the fleet from the dedicated depot planned for Washwood Heath in Birmingham, which will also be home to the HS2 Network Control Centre – together creating hundreds of skilled jobs.

The announcement comes after the opening of the new National College for High Speed Rail in Birmingham and Doncaster and after work began on Phase One of the project to connect London and Birmingham.

HS2 Ltd will now continue to work with the shortlisted bidders and potential UK suppliers to create opportunities, boost skills and encourage a wide range of people to join the HS2 workforce.

In total, construction of the full HS2 route to the north-west and Yorkshire will create up to 25,000 jobs and 2,000 apprenticeships. Another 3,000 people will operate HS2 and it is estimated that growth around new HS2 stations will create another 100,000 jobs.

Invitations to tender are expected to be issued to shortlisted bidders in spring 2018 with contract award following in late 2019. A further competition will be run to provide trains for the second phase of the project which is due to commence services in 2033.

The government is delivering the biggest rail modernisation programme for over a century and is determined to see Britain's train building sector go from strength to strength. Rail industry leaders have forecast that thousands of new state-of-the-art trains will be rolling off UK production lines over the coming years.

Hitachi Rail Europe's manufacturing facility in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, is building more than 100 Intercity Express trains which will be rolled out across the Great Western and East Coast lines over the next 3 years.

And earlier this year it was announced Derby's Bombardier had secured a multi-million pound investment to build 90 new trains for South Western passengers. The trains will be based on the Bombardier Aventra platform, which is also being used for the 70 new trains for Crossrail – which is due to open in 2018 as the Elizabeth Line – and for new trains for the London Overground and East Anglia.

There are also commitments from other manufacturers to make substantial investments in facilities in Britain with Alstom developing their new train technology and manufacturing facility at Widnes and CAF manufacturing in Newport.

HS2 will also bring benefits including faster journey times to Scotland.

Under Phase One of HS2, between London Euston and Birmingham, journeys from London to Glasgow will fall to under 4 hours. By 2027, and the opening of the expansion of the network to Crewe, the journey between Glasgow and London will be reduced by 45 minutes compared to today.

HS2 will also mean that by 2033 journey times between London and Glasgow and Edinburgh will be reduced to around 3 hours and 40 minutes.

Press release: PM meeting with the automotive sector: 1 November 2017

This afternoon the Prime Minister chaired a meeting of senior executives from the UK and European automotive sector at Downing Street.

At the meeting the Prime Minister highlighted the success of the UK's sector, noting that we are the third largest producer in Europe and the most productive of its big car manufacturers.

The opportunities presented by the transition to low-emission vehicles, the internet of things and wider developments in manufacturing technologies were discussed, and the role of the Industrial Strategy in making sure the UK is at the forefront of these developments was pressed.

Brexit, the challenges it presents and the priorities for industry were also discussed. The business representatives highlighted the importance of quick and seamless access to international suppliers as well being able to access the talent they need.

The Prime Minister and the Business Secretary reiterated the government's aim for an ambitious economic partnership with the EU, as well as an implementation period that ensures businesses only have to adapt to one set of changes. They also agreed the need for continued engagement with the sector.

News story: New sleep-in shift pay compliance scheme launched to support social care sector and identify back

pay for workers

The government has launched a new compliance scheme for social care providers that may have incorrectly paid workers below legal minimum wage hourly rates for sleep-in shifts.

Social care employers will be able to opt into the new Social Care Compliance Scheme (SCCS), giving them up to a year to identify what they owe to workers, supported by advice from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Employers who identify arrears at the end of the self-review period will have up to three months to pay workers.

The government is committed to creating an economy that works for everyone, and ensuring workers are paid fairly according to the law. The scheme has been designed to help ensure workers are paid what they are owed, while also maintaining important services for people who access social care.

HMRC will write to social care employers who currently have a complaint against them for allegedly underpaying minimum wage rates for sleep-in shifts to encourage them to sign up to the scheme. Employers that choose not to opt into the scheme will be subject to HMRC's normal enforcement approach.

The government is exploring options to minimise any impact on the sector. The government has opened discussions with the European Commission to determine whether any support, if deemed necessary, would be subject to EU state aid rules.

Earlier this year the government waived further penalties for sleep-in shifts underpayment arising before 26 July 2017. This was in response to concerns over the combined impact which financial penalties and arrears of wages could have on the stability and long-term viability of social care providers. Enforcement action for sleep-in shifts in the social care sector was temporarily suspended between 26 July and 1 November 2017.

Government reiterated again today its expectation that all employers pay their workers according to the law, including for sleep-in shifts, as set out in guidance entitled [Calculating the minimum wage](#).

Read the updated on guidance sleep-in shifts here: [National minimum wage law: enforcement](#).