

News story: Queens Park Rangers sign the Armed Forces Covenant

The club, which has pledged to help service leavers and veterans achieve their goals and find jobs with its Community Trust work skills programme, run in conjunction with the Royal British Legion, signed the covenant during their match with fellow Covenant members Wigan on Tuesday.

The scheme, which helps personnel prepare for life after the military, has already helped half of its previously unemployed participants find work.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster, who attended the signing, with the Chief of Defence People Lt General Richard Nugee, said:

It is great to see that QPR are signing the Armed Forces Covenant. The success of their employability programme shows how a football club can help service leavers and veterans improve skills and find jobs.

I encourage other clubs to support the covenant and ensure all those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

QPR have also pledged to work with the Ministry of Defence's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to provide a career pathway for personnel leaving the Armed Forces, and to support club employees who are training or deployed as Reservists.

QPR's CEO Lee Hoos said:

I'm very proud that we are the first London club to sign the Armed Forces covenant. This will build on the strong relationship the club already has with the local Armed Forces community, including 4 PARA and the White City cadets, as well as the employability programme we recently ran with the Royal British Legion for Armed Forces veterans.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation, enshrined in law, that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

Over 1,440 businesses and organisations across the UK have already signed, making practical pledges that have made a difference across the Armed Forces community.

Press release: Historic WTO agreement will reduce exporting red tape and boost UK trade

The first multilateral agreement successfully negotiated through the WTO, and now ratified by more than 110 countries, will come into force immediately and will see WTO members benefit from greater trade by cutting burdensome red tape associated with goods exporting.

Once fully implemented, the global economy could see a benefit of £70 billion.

International Trade Secretary, Dr. Liam Fox, said:

We have fully supported this historic agreement which will remove some of the barriers to cross-border trade and could benefit the UK economy by up to £1 billion. We will now work with other WTO members to ensure economies, both developed and developing, fully realise the benefits it will bring to their citizens.

The UK has long supported initiatives that will make trade across borders easier, but despite the work that has already been done on border controls until now goods have continued to be delayed at borders slowing trade flows and adding costs to business which in turn might be passed on to consumers. We welcome this WTO success story.

Over three-quarters of the WTO's members are either developing or transitioning into market economies. The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) will have the greatest impact for the economies of the world's poorest nations – to sub-Saharan economies this could be upwards of \$10 billion per year.

As a result of the TFA, those countries that have ratified will be required to:

- publish fees and charges online
- introduce a 'fast track' for perishable goods – reducing the amount of food that rots while waiting to cross borders
- allow pre-arrival processing of documentation
- allow the use of copies of documents, rather than originals
- allow for the right to appeal customs decisions

By helping to improve transparency, predictability and consistency, the TFA should lead to reduced trade costs and create the environment for small and medium sized enterprises to play a greater role in the international supply chain.

Studies suggest the agreement – which largely concerns the cost of clearing goods for import and export – will greatly reduce costs, time and the number of documents required for goods to cross borders. They also suggest the TFA could add over £70 billion to the global economy, of which the UK is expected to benefit by up to £1 billion and could reduce worldwide trade costs by between 12.5% and 17.5%.

Negotiations on the Trade Facilitation Agreement were concluded at the WTO's Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013 and since then work has been under way to reach the two-thirds of WTO Members ratifications required for the TFA to come into force.

It has long been shown that trade lifts countries out of poverty and the UK will continue to work with developing countries to help them ratify and implement the agreement to ensure they benefit from reduced trade costs and waiting times.

[News story: MOD signs £146 million contract to upgrade RAF's long-range missile](#)

The shared deal with MDBA will see the UK's Storm Shadow and France's SCALP missiles updated so they remain fit for purpose and ready for operational use.

During an inward visit by Laurent Collet-Billon, the Minister confirmed the strong partnership with France in a series of meetings at Lancaster House. The collaboration is providing a £50 million saving for both sides.

The contract will keep the missile in service for the next decade and beyond and help to sustain around 60 UK jobs. Storm Shadow is a combat-proven, long-range, precision cruise missile, already in service with RAF Tornados, deployed recently against Daesh in Iraq.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin said:

Storm Shadow is a proven and vital missile for the RAF, and this £146 million upgrade will ensure it is always ready for whenever our Armed Forces might need it to defend our way of life.

This contract is an important part of the Government's £178 billion plan to ensure our armed forces have the right equipment at the right time.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin with her French counterpart Laurent Collet-Billon. Crown Copyright.

The midlife refurbishment programme has been developed in co-operation with the French Government who will be updating their own similar missile known as SCALP.

By taking advantage of the similarities, this collaboration not only reaffirms the strong defence relationship as outlined under the Lancaster House Agreement, but has also resulted in a £50 million saving for both the UK and France.

The regeneration will consist of a midlife refurbishment of current missile parts such as the turbo-jet engine, an upgrade of the navigational system, and a like for like replacement of items such as the cabling, seals and gaskets.

The work will sustain around 60 jobs at MBDA in Stevenage and Bolton, in a variety of roles including software and systems engineering. Over 40 jobs will also be sustained through the supply chain.

Chief Executive at the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support Organisation, Tony Douglas said:

The contract to regenerate Storm Shadow, a combat-proven, all-weather precision missile, provides a clear example of the MOD and UK industry working effectively together with our counter parts in France; providing our UK Armed Forces with the best equipment possible while sustaining dozens of UK jobs.

Two Storm Shadow missiles on a Tornado GR4. Crown Copyright.

Storm Shadow is designed to target substantial buildings and structures, such as military facilities, control centres, bunkers, missile sites, airfields and bridges, which might otherwise require the use of several aircraft over the course of numerous missions.

France is the UK's most important European Ally, with both countries' defence budgets together account for almost half of all European defence spending. This deal is the most recent example of collaboration in a long history of cooperation on defence and security. The £146 million investment in Storm Shadow will sustain the missile until its planned out of service date in 2032.

Laurent Collet-Billon, Délégué Général pour l'Armement said:

This deep-strike missile mid-life update was jointly prepared. It represents a new step in the Franco-British cooperation roadmap and strengthens the Franco-British strategic partnership in the armament field.

Press release: Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan visits Montenegro and Macedonia

From:

First published:

22 February 2017

Part of:

His visit underlines the UK's commitment to playing an active and supportive role in the Western Balkans.

During his visit to the Montenegrin capital Podgorica, the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, will reaffirm the UK's commitment to the region and Montenegro during his meetings with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Minister for European Affairs. He will spend time with key civil society organisations from Montenegro, and discuss important reforms on corruption, the rule of law and media.

In Macedonia, Sir Alan will meet President Ivanov and the leaders of all political parties represented in the Macedonian Assembly. They will discuss the current political situation, the need for important reforms to enable progress on NATO and EU accession and their plans to build a prosperous and inclusive country. He will also meet members of Macedonia's civil society, and rule of law institutions focused on the future of Macedonia.

Ahead of the visit, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan said:

The Western Balkans is a key region for the UK. We are committed to playing an active and supportive role. I'm delighted that my visit will build on this by developing opportunities for future cooperation on security, prosperity and reform.

We have long supported both Macedonia and Montenegro on their paths towards EU accession and NATO membership, which will require vital progress on reforms within both countries.

Of course, challenges remain. I am eager to hear from politicians and civil society so we can better understand how the UK can support both countries to be stable, secure and prosperous.

Further information

[News story: Marine Management Organisation \(MMO\) issue authorisations to catch bass](#)

From:

First published:

22 February 2017

Part of:

From 22 February 2017 the MMO will be issuing letters to fishermen.

In order to protect bass stocks and the sustainability of the wider marine environment from 22 February 2017 the MMO will be issuing letters to fishermen who, based on their track records, have authorisation to catch bass. The MMO will also send letters to those who do not have such authorisation.

The letters include details of a representation process through which fishermen can, on limited grounds, provide evidence to the MMO should they wish to challenge the authorisation decisions which have been made. The deadline for such representations is 14 March 2017.

The MMO action is a response to Article 9(2) of Council Regulation (EU) 2017/127 which fixed the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters in 2017.

Phil Haslam (MMO Director of Operations) said:

“The bass authorisations help implement EC measures designed to manage effort in order to help protect and improve Bass stocks.

I would urge fishermen to read the letters they receive and familiarise themselves with the bass regulations and the representation process. Those that feel they meet the representation criteria and can provide the relevant evidence should do so at the earliest opportunity and certainly before the 14 March 2017 deadline”.

Full details of the [bass regulations and the representation process](#) have been published on the [MMO website](#).

Assistance is also available via [MMO coastal offices](#).