

News story: Britain, coalition and Iraqi forces to maintain momentum in campaign against Daesh, Defence Secretary says

Speaking in Iraq, where local Iraqi and Coalition forces recently scored a major victory in the fight against Daesh in eastern Mosul, Sir Michael welcomed the progress made in defeating Daesh in Iraq.

Sir Michael saw how Britain's commitment to training Iraqi forces, which was stepped up last year is having an effect in the fight against Daesh. Numbers of Iraqi Security Forces trained by UK and Coalition personnel has increased threefold since October 2016, with around 3,000 Iraqi forces now being trained every month, 10,000 troops have been trained since the end of October 2016, increasing the Iraqi force's skills and ability to defeat Daesh.

With operations to clear the western approaches to Mosul already underway, Sir Michael met with the Prime Minister, President and Defence Minister of Iraq, and the Prime Minister and other representatives of the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq, to take review campaign progress and planning

During his visit, Sir Michael also met with UK personnel training Iraqi security forces. Britain leads the Coalition's training programme in Iraq, and so far has helped to train nearly 40,000 troops. The training in countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is proving to be vital, as Daesh have booby trapped many parts of eastern Mosul during its occupation. Iraqi forces have been using their training to dispose of these crude devices, allowing their forces to advance and civilians to safely return to their homes. This training will also prove essential when forces move into the heavily mined and densely populated neighbourhoods of western Mosul.

The liberation of eastern Mosul marked a major victory for Iraqi forces, who Sir Michael praised for their patient and deliberate operation, taking care to minimise the risk to civilians. The RAF also played an important role in the Iraqi victory, providing sustained close air support to Iraqi troops. RAF Reaper aircraft played a particularly vital role, delivering precision attacks on Daesh extremists engaged in street fighting, while also using its advanced sensors to alert Iraqi ground forces to the presence of civilians.

Residents in eastern Mosul are already returning to their homes, with over 29,000 having done so in recent weeks. The liberation has also enabled more than 23,000 children to return to school and continue their education.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Iraqi forces, supported by Britain and the Coalition, have made

strong progress in the fight against Daesh. We're keeping up the momentum with operations to liberate western Mosul due to start shortly.

This will be a more complex fight in a densely populated urban environment. Britain will continue playing its part providing precision strikes, vital intelligence, and training Iraqi forces to deal with explosive devices planted by Daesh.

Sir Michael also announced that Britain will send a UK military officer to help lead NATO's newly established training mission in Iraq, from July this year. The new NATO training and capacity building team will help the Iraqis in dealing with the threats they face, including to counter Daesh improvised explosive devices. The UK has already contributed £1 million to help establish NATO's presence in Baghdad, which will provide expert advice on defence issues to the Iraqi Government.

Press release: Search underway for UK's first Small Business Commissioner

- Commissioner appointment an important measure in tackling late payment issues
- Expected to be based in Birmingham, the Commissioner will be a national champion for small businesses

Applications are open to become the UK's first Small Business Commissioner – a high profile role supporting small businesses in payment disputes with their larger customers.

The successful candidate will provide general advice and information, handle complaints about payment issues and direct small businesses to existing dispute resolution services. Recent findings from the payment processor Bacs report that nearly half of the UK's small-to-medium sized businesses experience late payment, with £26.3 billion owed to them in total.

Applications open today (12 February 2017) and run until Monday 13 March 2017. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is looking for candidates who have credibility with both small and large businesses; can advise parties in resolving disputes; and who have an appetite to become a national spokesperson for small businesses affected by payment issues.

The final appointment decision will be made by the Secretary of State, supported by a panel which will include Mike Cherry, the National Chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses.

Small Business Minister Margot James said:

We all rely on the UK's 5.5 million small and medium sized businesses for jobs, goods and services, and an unfair payment culture that hurts these firms has no place in an economy that works for all. This is why we are looking for an exceptional individual to help smaller firms resolve payment disputes and champion a culture change in how businesses work together.

Addressing the barriers businesses face when scaling up and growing is an important part of a modern Industrial Strategy, and this appointment will play an integral role in ensuring small businesses have the support they need to thrive and grow.

Mike Cherry, National Chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

I am delighted to be invited by the Secretary of State to be part of the selection process for the Small Business Commissioner. There is simply no excuse for a business culture where supply chain bullying or poor payment practice are acceptable. FSB research shows that poor payment practice is on the rise, causing 50,000 business deaths each year.

Small firms need a Commissioner who will make a meaningful difference to the £26bn currently stuck in bank accounts as payments outstanding to SMEs. He or she must be given the powers and resources to tackle this, to step in to save small firms whose livelihoods are under threat, and to promote a prompt payment culture right across the economy.

The Small Business Commissioner, expected to be based in Birmingham, is just one part of a package of measures designed to tackle this and drive a real change in the UK's payment culture. Regulations coming into force in April 2017 will require big businesses to publically report on the time taken to pay their suppliers, and guidance to help large businesses comply with these changes was published last month. This will shine a light on poor payment practices and allow suppliers, including small businesses, to make informed decisions about who they do business with.

[Press release: Blockbuster year for](#)

the Brits

Spend on UK film and TV production in the UK soared in 2016, reaching £1.6 billion, a 13 per cent increase on 2015, according to figures released by the BFI. Of that, £1.35 billion was invested by 48 major inward investment films basing themselves in the UK.

Showing that we're more than capable of competing on the world stage, this year's top three grossing films at the UK box office were all made on British soil: Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them and Bridget Jones's Baby. Overall there was a good turnout at the UK box office too, with cinema ticket sales at a second time high, raking in £1.227 billion.

But film wasn't the only sector to thrive in 2016. TV too had its moment, with overseas companies flocking to the UK to spend £478 million on making high-end TV shows such as The Crown and Game of Thrones.

Foreign markets were also clamouring for our creative content, with figures from PACT's UK Television Exports Report showing that UK's sales of television exports to international markets have risen by 10 per cent, from £1.2 billion in 2014/15 to £1.3 billion in 2015/16. There's also been a large increase in sales in the Chinese market, which is up 40 per cent on 2014/15, with the UK and China TV co-production treaty signed at the end of last year sure to further boost those numbers.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said:

It's no surprise that our creative industries go from strength to strength when we can boast such superb talent and expertise. The UK is an international powerhouse of film, TV and music and this Government will keep backing our creative brilliance. As we prepare to leave the European Union this success story is a great advert for Global Britain – an outward-looking, globally-minded country that is open for business.

Proving that music is the UK's forte, figures released by UK record labels' association the BPI, showed that the continuing surge in audio streaming and accelerating demand for vinyl LPs helped achieve another successful year for British music in 2016. We were listening to even more music last year thanks to an explosive rise in audio streaming, which has increased 500 per cent since 2013.

Geoff Taylor, Chief Executive of BPI and the BRIT Awards said:

Propelled by the remarkable talent of its artists, and the investment and digital engagement of its record labels, British music has conquered the world. This success has not just fuelled

our music exports – in 2015 accounting for 1 in 6 albums sold around the world – it has enhanced the global appeal of British culture and in the process also made music the UK's international calling card.

Our acts dominated the UK charts, with 7 out of the year's top 10 best-selling artists coming from the UK. The popularity of Tottenham's Adele showed no sign of diminishing, with the songstress again winning 2016's best-selling artist album – the 12th year in a row the best-seller has come from UK. Other British acts that fared well include Michael Ball and Alfie Boe, whose duets album Together was the 2016's best-selling new release artist album, while The 1975 topped both the UK and US charts. With the BAFTAs and Grammys set to take centre stage this evening, and the BRIT awards and Oscars just around the corner, it looks like there will be even more to celebrate in 2017.

Adele and the late David Bowie lead the charge at this year's Grammys, and there's a visual feast of TV and film up for nomination at this year's BAFTAs including Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.

The Brit awards will be the ultimate British celebration of some of our best talent, and with a slew of British talent vying for Oscars, we will be able to reaffirm to the world that our creative industries are a force to be reckoned with, even though we contain less than one per cent of the world's population.

According to the British Film Commission, there are a whole host of UK-made films set to wow us this year as they hit the big screen including Warner Bros.'s Ready Player One, Disney's Beauty and the Beast, Lucasfilm's Star Wars: The Last Jedi and Twentieth Century Fox's Murder on the Orient Express.

And proving that Britain is still open for business and has the global reputation to attract talent from overseas, expect to see the likes of Mary Poppins Returns and detectives Holmes and Watson being filmed in the UK this year.

Amanda Nevill, CEO of the BFI said:

British stories and British talent are firing the global imagination. Films and television series such as I, Daniel Blake, Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them, Notes on Blindness and The Crown are generating investment, creating jobs and thrilling audiences – and fingers crossed winning yet more awards – at home and internationally. UK Film and TV employ tens of thousands in the UK, help bring international investment to our shores and take British culture to nations around the world. We can all be justifiably proud of the UK's success in these most dynamic and exciting art-forms.

As for TV produced in the UK, we can expect to see more of HBO's Game of

Thrones on our sets, along with Netflix/Left Bank's The Crown, Starz'/Company Pictures The White Princess, Crackle's Snatch, TNT's Will and Sony's Outlander.

It looks to be a stellar line-up for music too, with the likes of Stormzy, Gorillaz, Paul McCartney, Ed Sheeran, Tinie Tempah, Liam Gallagher and Deep Purple all set to put out new music.

Notes to Editors

- The UK-China TV Co-Production Treaty was signed in December 2016. Building upon the Film Co-Production Treaty, this is the second country to have this in place.
- Inward investment for Film is: £1.35 billion and for TV is 250 million.
- In 2014, the UK film industry had a turnover of £7.7 billion. The industry's direct contribution to Gross Domestic Product in 2014 was £4.3 billion. The industry exported £1.2 billion worth of services in 2014, made up of £519 million in royalties and £655 million in film production services. Exports in 2014 were 21 per cent higher than in 2005. The UK film trade surplus in 2014 was £715 million. (BFI).
- Exports for Music in 2014 stood at £644 million.

[Only 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force](#)

The way vehicle tax is calculated will be changing for new cars and some motorhomes from 1 April 2017. Time is flying by and we're just 50 days away.

We've been busy behind the scenes and [blogging regularly](#) about what DVLA is doing to prepare for the changes internally and with our customers. Here's a recap of where we are:

Over the past 12 months we've been working closely with stakeholders to make sure they're aware of these changes. We're changing the tax rules ready for 1 April and are developing a new service to register new vehicles to launch later in the year. To support the changes we set up and attended industry steering groups to hear the views of stakeholders, update progress and agree the changes.



We launched our public facing communications in November 2016 and have been informing customers about the changes. This publicity campaign is being run across social media, blogs as well as through messages on DVLA literature. We've also updated GOV.UK with the facts about the changes.

DVLA's contact centre is running an automated telephone service to quickly answer our customer's questions.

We also hosted [a webinar](#) in January for fleet customers with commentary provided by DVLA Service Designers Helen Jones and Rhian Townsend.

We've been keeping a close eye on how these communications are performing and what people think. From this we know that the most popular query amongst the public is whether these changes will affect existing vehicles. The answer? No they don't. The new rates only affect cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA on or after 1 April 2017.

So, the countdown is well underway with only 50 days to go until the new vehicle tax rates come into force.

I'm sure this will fly by so please keep up to date with this topic and others by following DVLA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and subscribing to our [Digital Services Blog](#).

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[Press release: 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force](#)

From:

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DVLA is reminding motorists that there are just 50 days to go until new vehicle tax rates come into force for all cars and some motor homes that are first registered from 1 April 2017.

Rohan Gye, DVLA Vehicle Service Manager, said:

These changes won't affect any vehicles that are registered before 1 April 2017. So, for anyone who already owns a car or is thinking of buying a used car the rates of vehicle tax will not be changing. However, anyone considering buying a new car that will be first registered from 1 April should check the [vehicle tax rates table](#) on GOV.UK to find out how much they'll pay.

Under the changes, vehicle tax for the first year will continue to be based on CO2 emissions. After the first year, the amount of tax to pay will depend on the type of vehicle. The new rates are:

- £140 a year for petrol or diesel vehicles
- £130 a year for alternative fuel vehicles (hybrids, bioethanol and LPG)
- £0 a year for vehicles with zero CO2 emissions

In addition, for vehicles with a list price of more than £40,000, the rate of tax is based on CO2 emissions for the first year. After the first year, the rate depends on the type of vehicle (petrol, diesel, zero emission etc) and an additional rate of £310 a year for the next 5 years. After those 5 years, the vehicle will then be taxed at one of the standard rates (£140, £130 or £0) depending on the vehicle.

There is also [further information](#) available on the changes.