

[OPSS supports new guide for bringing safe products to market](#)

News story

Bringing safe products to market Code of Practice, PAS 7050:2022, is published and free to download.



In recent months OPSS has been working with consumers and businesses to support the development of a Code of Practice that will help businesses understand their responsibilities to supply safe products to consumers.

The [UK National Standards Body, the British Standards Institution](#) (BSI) has been sponsored by OPSS to publish a Code of Practice to support business with bringing products to market safely. PAS 7050:2022, Bringing safe products to market, published on 25 March 2022, helps businesses meet their obligations under products safety law that requires that new and used consumer products placed on the market are safe.

Graham Russell, Chief Executive of the Office for Product Safety and Standards, said:

As product supply chains become more complex, businesses need to develop their systems to ensure they only bring safe products to market. This new Code will help protect consumers by supporting businesses to get it right first time

The (PAS) has been developed by BSI, who have brought experts together from consumer organisations, manufacturers, retailer's businesses, and regulators.

OPSS also asked BSI to lead a review of the product recalls and corrective actions – PAS 7100. These two Codes of Practice now complement each other. This revised PAS for better product recalls incorporates changes to include online marketplaces and repair and refurbishment.

British Embassy statement on Lebanese banks closing bank accounts

This unilateral action by the banks has singled out account holders on the basis of their British residency or nationality, in what appears to be a targeted and discriminatory manner.

We continue to raise our strong concerns with senior representatives of the Lebanese government, the Lebanese financial authorities and Lebanon's banking institutions.

Since the banks began closing accounts, British Ambassador Ian Collard has met the Depositors Union, the Chair of the Association of Banks in Lebanon, senior representatives of some of the banking institutions, the Chair of the Banking Control Commission, the Governor of the Central Bank and the Prime Minister of Lebanon. In each of his meetings, the Ambassador made clear his concerns about the treatment of British national and British resident depositors in Lebanon and the legitimate perception of discriminatory action against them, as well as possible breaches of relevant banking laws and regulations.

Ambassador Collard has urged the Lebanese authorities to ensure that all depositors are properly and fairly treated, and he underlined the importance of Lebanese banks not discriminating against account holders on the basis of their British nationality or residency.

The Ambassador was assured by the Chair of the Banking Commission and Governor of the Central Bank that steps are actively being considered to appropriately protect all affected depositors.

In light of the banks' actions, the British Embassy recommends that any British national who has been impacted by the banks' decisions seeks qualified legal advice in Lebanon. This is not a service that the Embassy can provide. Should they need it, British nationals can find a list of English-speaking legal representatives in Lebanon on the [UK government website](#).

This unfortunate situation is symptomatic of Lebanon's failing economy. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, the United Kingdom has joined international partners in calling on the Government of Lebanon to adopt overdue and essential economic reforms. Without such reforms, Lebanon's economy continues its free fall, with serious impacts on all banking depositors in Lebanon, as well as Lebanese citizens more generally and others residing in Lebanon. Reforms represent the only path to rebuild Lebanon's economy.

The British Embassy will continue to make the case in our engagements that British nationals and residents should not be unfairly impacted by the banks' decisions, and calls for a rapid resolution to this matter.

Landmark £1.2 billion share sale sees Government stake in NatWest Group reduced to below 50% for first time since financial crisis

News story

Government stake in NatWest reduced to 48.1%; Important landmark reached in returning the bank to private ownership; Share sale raises over £1.2 billion.



For the first time since the financial crisis, NatWest Group plc (formerly Royal Bank of Scotland Group plc) is no longer under majority public ownership following a £1.2 billion sale of part of the government's shareholding back to NatWest.

This is the government's fifth sale of its NatWest shareholding bringing its level of ownership down from 50.6% to 48.1%. This is a landmark in the government's plan to return to private ownership the institutions brought into public ownership as a result of the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury authorised the sale of approximately 550 million shares in NatWest at 220.5p per share raising a total of £1.2 billion. The shares were bought back by NatWest and the process was managed by UK Government Investments.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen said:

This sale means that the government is no longer the majority owner of NatWest Group and is therefore an important landmark in our plan to return the bank to the private sector. We will continue to prioritise delivering value for money for the taxpayer as we take forward this plan.

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[Climbing the value chain in the Fiji ginger industry](#)

At the Qere Mai Lagi ginger farm in Fiji, the future is looking bright.

Through his association with the United Kingdom Trade Partnership (UKTP) Programme in Fiji, Ifereimi Vasu and Jason Zhong are part of an industry-wide revival in the ginger sector bringing new jobs, higher productivity and increased incomes across the entire agricultural value-chain.

Since 2019, the UKTP Programme has worked with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to increase exports to the United Kingdom and the European Union through the better use of Economic Partnership Agreements.

The programme identified untapped potential in Fiji's ginger industry, including for value-added products such as crystalised ginger and ginger syrup. From the farmers to the factory workers to the financiers, at the heart of this programme is an approach which seeks to identify, connect, and support all actors along the value-chain. The value-chain model starts with farmers like Ifereimi and Jason, their families, and rural communities.

Through site selection, land preparation works, individual farm visits by the programme team and support from the Ministry of Agriculture, over 150 new farms were selected for financial assistance through the Fiji Development Bank over a two-year period. Rural training kits were distributed and over 100 loan applications targeting smallholder farmers were lodged leading to over \$1 million dollars of loans to ginger farmers being approved by the bank last year.

Despite two cyclonic seasons, farm yields have increased and the production factory is buzzing as the reputation for quality Fiji ginger products gathers momentum.

For the ginger industry to grow and be sustainable, it had to deliver benefits across all parts of the community. This was an important design element of the programme. The ginger sector provides employment for Fijians

beyond the farm gate, with ginger processing employing more than 230 people, 75 per cent of whom are women.

The Senior Agriculture Extension Officer for the UKTP Fiji programme, Ms Mereseini Naivola, said:

Inviting both men and women to participate in UKTP training activities has resulted in men and women being seen working side-by-side on ginger farms. This has become a more socially acceptable practice across the ginger industry.

Up to 570 seasonal labourers have been provided with more regular and continuous work due to the larger production volumes and the model has supported farmers living with disabilities. For farmers not able to join training sessions in person, UKTP has developed 16 instructional videos which could be viewed on smart phones through the mobile network.

The British High Commissioner to Fiji, Dr Brian Jones, said:

It was great meeting Ifereimi and Jason, hearing their passion for ginger farming and recognise the skill and competence they have built. Many people I've met in Fiji so far have told me about the potential of ginger farming and export, and I am so happy the UK is engaging in such a promising sector. There is more to be done supporting the farmers and Fiji get the best price for their world-class ginger, and I look forward to the results this year will bring.

As the world is opening up again from the global pandemic, the agro-value chain model is having genuine success in Fiji.

The consolidated income generated by ginger farmers in the UKTP programme has increased threefold since the programme started.

The farm-gate price for ginger is up by 60 per cent, so farmers, producers and the financiers are all celebrating.

And with new Fiji ginger products being sold in markets across the UK, Europe and Australia, the outlook for passionate ginger farmers such as Ifereimi and Jason is looking very bright indeed.

[UK delivers NATO supplies and conducts](#)

patrols with JEF partners

Royal Navy vessels have joined ships, aircraft and personnel from six [Joint Expeditionary Force \(JEF\)](#) nations to provide support to NATO and bolster security in the Baltic Sea.

[HMS Northumberland](#) and sister ship [HMS Richmond](#) joined Danish frigate HDMS Niels Juel and warships from Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for maritime patrols in the strategically important region.

JEF naval vessels escorted Danish and British supply ships as they delivered military vehicles and equipment to resupply the UK-led NATO Battlegroup in Estonia, where troops from the UK and Denmark are serving side by side. The UK recently [doubled the number of troops](#) in Estonia as part of wider NATO efforts to strengthen its eastern defences following Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

As well as patrolling and delivering the vital supplies, the warships and aircraft conducted a series of joint exercises to demonstrate and hone their seamless interoperability. Danish F-16s and Swedish Gripen fighter jets rehearsed air defence tactics with the vessels, while one of the UK's new [RAF Poseidon P8A](#) submarine hunter aircraft practiced working with the ships to spot enemy vessels.

Major General Jim Morris DSO, the Commander of the UK Standing Joint Force HQ (SJFHQ) which leads the JEF, said:

“Activities such as these in the Baltic Sea are routine business for us and our JEF partners, in one of our principal areas of geographical interest.

“Given the current level of aggression being displayed by Russia, there has never been a more important time to ensure that freedom of navigation is maintained in the Baltic Sea.”

This region is of vital strategic importance as we seek to ensure stability and freedom of navigation in the Baltic Sea.

The [JEF](#) is a UK-led force, comprising 10 nations working together to deliver forces at high readiness, across a range of roles, complementing NATO and European security. The coalition focuses on security in the Baltic Sea region, the High North and the North Atlantic, where its members are located.

In March, the Prime Minister hosted JEF leaders in London for the first ever leader-level summit. At the leaders' summit, JEF members committed to supporting Ukraine with defensive military aid and ensuring that JEF continued to play a credible role in contributing to defence and deterrence in the region. The meeting followed meetings of Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Defence in February.

The coalition is complementary to NATO's wider strategic posture which

originated from the [2014 NATO summit](#) in Wales. Led by the UK as framework nation, it is agile and responsive, acting flexibly either in smaller groupings or as ten nations communicating with one voice.

Rear Admiral Torben Mikkelsen, Chief of the Royal Danish Navy, said:

“The current situation calls for increased focus on security of the Baltic Sea and stability of our region. The Danish Navy will, with our partners in the JEF alliance, do our utmost to contribute to that.”

A busy schedule of activity over the coming months and years will see the JEF operating across its core areas of the North Atlantic, High North and Baltic Sea Region, with a particular focus on the upcoming Command Post Exercise Joint Protector later in 2022, followed by the Live Exercise JEF Warrior in 2023.