

News story: Top industry group pledges to support veteran entrepreneurs

The Institute of Directors (IoD) became the latest organisation to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant yesterday at their annual conference in London.

The IoD's Covenant pledges also include allowing veterans to access their organisation's expert network of advice and resources for entrepreneurs, joining with the MOD on forging stronger links between business and the military, and encouraging businesses to help the small number of veterans who struggle with mental health issues.



Earl Howe and Stephen Martin sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The signing comes as National Express, the first business to sign the Covenant in 2013, renewed their commitment to the military community at an event on Horse Guards Parade.

The signings demonstrate how the support for the Armed Forces Covenant has grown across the UK since it was first introduced as part of the Armed Forces Act 2011, with over 2,200 organisations having pledged their support.

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

Institute of Directors

Defence Minister Earl Howe attended the annual Institute of Directors Open House conference in Pall Mall yesterday to countersign the Armed Forces Covenant with Director General Stephen Martin.

Defence Minister for the House of Lords Earl Howe said:

The Institute of Directors signing the Armed Forces Covenant sends a powerful message to its members and those in the wider economy that they are a Forces-friendly organisation, helping to attract high-quality Service leavers who bring with them a wide range of skills and experience.

Stephen Martin, Director General of the Institute of Directors, said:

I'm extremely proud to signing the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Institute of Directors, and I look forward to the IoD's continued engagement with the Ministry of Defence. In signing the Covenant, the IoD will help to ensure that the immense contribution the armed forces make to our society and to business does not go unrecognised. Not only do service personnel provide the security and freedom that underpins our lives, but they also have the potential to become great assets to the UK economy, bringing the wide array of skills and experience they have gained to businesses activity the country.

In becoming a signatory to the covenant, we will use the tools at our disposal to highlight the many benefits of employing those coming out of the armed forces. In keeping with our Royal Charter, we will also look to help budding ex-services entrepreneurs to establish the networks, confidence, and skills they need to start and scale their own businesses.

The IOD will open its 2,500 members strong IoD99 networking and social events to ex-service entrepreneurs and champion stronger links between the business community and the Armed Forces, showcasing those that highlight the benefits to employers of taking on ex-Service personnel.

National Express

Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood countersigned National Express' Covenant renewal alongside their Group Chief Executive Dean Finch during a networking event at Horse Guards Parade in central London yesterday. A Covenant branded National Express coach, which will be navigating the London airport routes, was parked on Horse Guards for a photoshoot with the Queen's Guard to mark the occasion.



Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood at the National Express re-signing on Horse Guards Parade.

National Express Group Chief Executive Dean Finch said:

We're very proud to have been the first company to sign the Covenant and I am delighted we are signing an even greater commitment today. Armed Forces personnel and their families do a great service to this country and it is right that companies like ours do what we can to support them.

We employ many ex-services members and current reservists and also want to recognise their significant contribution to our company and the country. Our extended commitments demonstrate both the success of our first covenant and our commitment to growing this important partnership with the Ministry of Defence. I would like to thank all involved in this great initiative.

National Express will offer guaranteed interviews to service leavers and their families for all National Express roles across Coach and Bus, provide ten days extra leave for staff in the Reserve Forces, and offer free bus travel to families visiting soldiers at the Military Hospital at the QE in Birmingham and to volunteers on Remembrance Sunday.

The company already employs over 40 former forces personnel and reservists in a variety of roles including: drivers, health and safety officers, bus engineers, and customer service advisors from all over the Armed Forces,

ranking from Private all the way up to Major.

[News story: Top industry group pledges to support veteran entrepreneurs](#)

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[News story: Novichok nerve agent use in Salisbury: UK government response](#)

Updated: Statement to the OPCW Executive Council added

On Sunday 4 March Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned in Salisbury with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

G7 foreign ministers' statement

The [G7 foreign ministers issued a statement](#) condemning the nerve agent attack and agreeing with the UK's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation was responsible.

Letter to NATO

On 13 April UK National Security Adviser Sir Mark Sedwill sent a [letter to Jens Stoltenberg NATO Secretary General](#) setting out further information on how Russia has the technical means, operational experience and the motive for the Salisbury attack. The UK Ambassador to Russia gave a [briefing to the international diplomatic community](#).

OPCW report

On 12 April the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\) published their report](#). It confirmed the UK findings: the toxic chemical used in the attempted assassination of Sergei and Yulia Skripal was a military grade nerve agent – a Novichok.

The [Foreign Secretary gave a statement on the OPCW report](#) and the [Head of UK Delegation updated the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#).

On 18 April Peter Wilson, UK Permanent Representative to the OPCW gave a [statement to the Executive Council](#).

[OPCW findings](#)

Read the [Foreign Secretary's statement](#).

UN Security Council and OPCW meetings

On 5 April the UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Karen Pierce, gave a [statement at the UN Security Council emergency meeting](#) called by Russia. Writing in the Sunday Times on 8 April, the Foreign Secretary said that [only Russia could have committed this crime](#).

At the request of Russia, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council met on 4 April. The [Acting UK Permanent Representative to the OPCW responded](#) on the UK's actions, in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Following the defeat of Russia's proposals, the [Foreign Secretary gave a statement](#).

Prime Minister's 26 March statement on collective diplomatic expulsions

Speaking in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister said that 18 countries have announced their intention to expel more than 100 Russian intelligence officers. This includes 15 EU member states as well as the US, Canada and the Ukraine, and is the largest collective expulsion of Russian intelligence officers in history. Find out more in the Prime Minister's [Commons statement on national security and Russia](#).

The Prime Minister also spoke about this in her [Commons statement on the March European Council](#).

On 27 March the Foreign Secretary wrote in The Times that [our allies will expel Russian officials because they share our view of the threat posed by the Kremlin](#) to their values and security.



View our [Twitter Moment about our allies and partners expelling Russian intelligence officers](#).

In his 28 March [Mansion House speech](#), the Foreign Secretary thanked the 27 countries and NATO for expelling Russian officials whose presence they deem to be no longer conducive to the public good.

[Russian disinformation: 6 points](#)

The Russian government's response has demonstrated disdain for the gravity of the Salisbury attack.

Prime Minister's 14 March statement: immediate actions including diplomatic expulsions

In her [statement to Parliament on 14 March](#) the Prime Minister said that Russia provided no explanation as to how this agent came to be used in the UK. There is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable for the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, which was an unlawful use of force by the Russian State against the UK. The UK government would:

- expel 23 Russian diplomats identified as undeclared intelligence officers

- propose new legislative powers to harden defences against Hostile State Activity and ensure those seeking to carry out such activity cannot enter the UK
- suspend all planned high-level contacts between the UK and Russia

On 17 March the Foreign & Commonwealth Office issued [a statement in response to the Russian government's decision to expel UK diplomats](#), following the British Ambassador's meeting with the Russian government.

On 22 March British Ambassador to Russia, Laurie Bristow, gave a [briefing to the international diplomatic community](#)

Russian State disinformation

Writing for the Telegraph on 20 March, the Foreign Secretary looks at the [Russian State's disruptive behaviour in Russian elections and the Salisbury attack](#).

[Russian disinformation](#)

Russia's impact on global security

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson wrote an [article in the Washington Post](#) setting out Russia's threat to global security.

[The Kremlin has positioned Russia in direct opposition to the West](#)

Prime Minister's 12 March statement: seeking explanation from Russia

On 12 March [Prime Minister Theresa May gave a statement](#) in Parliament. Either this was a direct act by the Russian State against our country, or the Russian government lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others. The [Foreign Secretary spoke to the BBC](#) and reiterated the Prime Minister's message.

Russian state aggression in the past few years

[Pattern of Russian state aggression](#)

Home Secretary's initial statement

On 8 March the Home Secretary Amber Rudd gave an [initial statement on the investigation](#) into events in Salisbury. This followed Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's [response to an Urgent Question](#) in Parliament on 6 March.

International response

World leaders

On 22 March the [Prime Minister met with President Macron and Chancellor](#)

[Merkel](#) where the 3 leaders agreed on the importance of sending a strong European message in response to Russia's actions. The [European Council also issued a press release](#) on its conclusions about the Salisbury attack

On 15 March the leaders of France, Germany, the US and the UK have issued a [joint statement on the Salisbury attack](#).

The Prime Minister has spoken with world leaders about the ongoing investigation. Each expressed their solidarity with the UK:

- [call with Japanese Prime Minister Abe on 20 March](#)
- [call with Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki on 18 March](#)
- [call with Italian Prime Minister Gentiloni on 16 March](#)
- [call with Australian Prime Minister Turnbull on 16 March](#)
- [call with French President Macron on 15 March](#) and on [12 March](#)
- [call with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau on 14 March](#)
- [call with Prime Minister Xavier Bettel of Luxembourg on 14 March](#)
- [call with US President Trump on 13 March](#)
- [call with German Chancellor Merkel on 13 March](#)

On 13 March the Foreign Secretary also [called for a united response](#) with our international counterparts. Find out more about the international response in our [14 March Twitter Moment](#).

European Foreign Ministers express their solidarity

The [Foreign Secretary spoke to the media](#) before the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 March and the [Foreign Affairs Council issued a statement](#).

[Foreign Ministers express solidarity](#)

On 21 March [UK National Security Advisor Sir Mark Sedwill gave a statement](#) on his meeting with the EU High Representative, senior EU officials and representatives of member states.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Peter Wilson, UK Permanent Representative gave an [update to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#). This follows his [statement to the OPCW on 13 March](#).

[Independent technical experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#) arrive in the UK on 19 March to begin their investigation into the nerve agent used in the attempted assassinations in Salisbury.

[Independent OPCW investigation](#)

NATO

The Foreign Secretary and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg held a [joint press conference on 19 March](#).

On 15 March National Security Advisor Sir Mark Sedwill [briefed the NATO North Atlantic Council](#)

Other international organisations

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office also raised this issue in other international forums:

- Head of UK Delegation Sian MacLeod gave a [statement to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) on 15 March
- Ambassador Jonathan Allen gave a [briefing to the United Nations Security Council](#) on 14 March
- in the 37th Human Rights Council session Julian Braithwaite, the UK Permanent Representative, gave a [statement to the United Nations in Geneva](#) on 14 March

Related government announcements

On 17 April the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs gave an update on [decontamination work in Salisbury](#).

On 15 March Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced a [£48 million investment in a new Chemical Weapons Defence Centre](#) to maintain our cutting-edge in chemical analysis and defence.

Advice and guidance

- latest Foreign & Commonwealth Office [travel advice for Russia](#)
- Public Health England [advice for people in Salisbury](#)

[News story: Defence People Innovation Challenge Launch Event](#)

Updated: Presentation slides now added.

The [Defence People Innovation Challenge](#) officially launched on the 27 March 2018 at a Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) launch event in London.

Suppliers were invited to attend the event and submit ideas which are focused on the five sub-challenges; Recruitment, Skills and Training, Retention, Motivation and Rehabilitation, as outlined in the competition summary document.

View the [Morning presentation slides](#)

(PDF, 2.49MB, 67 pages)

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View the [Afternoon presentation slides](#)

(PDF, 2.83MB, 52 pages)

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People are central to Defence. We employ 195,520 full time military and civilians and 32,240 Part Time Reserves (as at 1 January 2018). We rely on the skills, commitment and professionalism of our people and place heavy demands on them. Recruiting, training and retaining the right mix of capable and motivated people is essential to success both on operations and at home.

Spending on People accounted for around 30% out of £36 billion Defence spending in 2016-17. Defence must continually keep its costs and activities under review to ensure that the best result is achieved with the resources available. This includes exploring all opportunities to consider how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our people and the supporting processes, behaviours and cultures.

The Defence People Innovation Challenge is intended to pull through innovative thinking from the private sector to help both address the challenges and consider how to integrate and exploit the benefits within current Defence structures.

Up to £3 million is available for this challenge in the first year with further funding available in future years.

The competition closes at midday on Wednesday 16 May 2018.

If you have any queries on how to enter this competition, please email the DASA inbox accelerator@dstl.gov.uk.

[News story: New offshore patrol vessel named HMS Trent](#)

Within the next few days the 90-metre warship, which is the third to be named following HMS Forth and HMS Medway, will take to the water for the first time and make the short journey across the Clyde from Govan to Scotstoun where she will be fitted out for sea trials.

The ship's sponsor, Mrs Pamela Potts, officially named the ship by pressing a

button to smash a bottle of gin, which was distilled close to the River Trent, against the hull. Trent's lady sponsor Mrs Potts is the wife of Vice Admiral Duncan Potts, Director General of the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

HMS Trent will, alongside her sister ships Forth, Medway, Tamar and Spey, make a significant contribution to the defence of the UK by performing vital counter-terrorism, anti-smuggling and other maritime security operations to secure the UK's borders.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Guto Bebb, said:

As the third of five Offshore Patrol Vessels being built in Scotland, HMS Trent will soon be part of a fleet of highly capable ships. These new vessels will keep the UK safe by conducting counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, anti-smuggling and other vital maritime operations. UK Defence has invested in an unprecedented ship-building production line in Glasgow and the city's shipyards with their 1,700 highly skilled engineers and technicians, benefiting from full order books for the next two decades.

The sixth Royal Navy vessel to bear the name, HMS Trent will be armed with a medium-calibre gun and a flight deck capable of accommodating a Merlin helicopter.

DE&S Chief of Materiel (Ships), Sir Simon Bollom, said:

This is another welcome milestone in the delivery of the Royal Navy's new Offshore Patrol Vessel fleet – one which we are celebrating alongside our partners in the Royal Navy and industry.

We look forward to the delivery of the remaining OPVs and good progress in the Type 26 build programme.

The work to build the new OPV fleet is sustaining jobs and the shipbuilding skills vital to the construction of the new Type 26 Frigate fleet. The first Type 26, HMS Glasgow, is currently under construction in Govan.

Following a period of rigorous sea trials, HMS Trent is expected to be delivered to the Royal Navy in the second half of 2018.