

News story: Armed Forces Minister confirms increase in support to Afghanistan

Speaking on his first visit to Afghanistan the Minister reaffirmed the UK's enduring commitment to the country.

Britain stepped up its support to Afghanistan this year, increasing by 50 the number of personnel in the country. They join personnel in country who are helping to train Afghan officers, advising the fledgling Afghan Air Force and working as advisors in the Afghan Security Ministries.

While UK and NATO combat operations drew to a close in 2014, Britain continues to support Afghanistan by training, advising and assisting the Afghan defence and security forces, as they continue to fight with increasing skill and capability. This year's increase in support brings the total number of the personnel committed to the operation to 500; Britain's second biggest overseas commitment after the campaign against Daesh.

During his visit, the Minister met with Afghan Cadet Behzad Hiedari, who won Sandhurst's Overseas Sword of Honour. The prestigious honour is awarded to the best overseas cadet in each year's class at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. The award highlights the talent in Afghanistan's security forces, which are being developed by the UK and our NATO Allies and partners.

One way in which British personnel are helping to develop Afghanistan's security forces is through the Afghan National Officer Academy (ANAOA). Minister Penning visited the site during the visit and met with the UK personnel helping to 'mentor the mentors'. Just as Afghan forces are in the lead for the security of their country, so are their UK-mentored officers, who are helping to train their country's next generation of leaders.

Mike Penning meets with a British adviser to female Afghan instructors for female cadets at ANAOA

Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning said:

Britain has an enduring commitment to Afghanistan. This year we're stepping up our support to the country, and have deployed 50 extra personnel, some of whom I visited at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, where the next generation of Afghan army leaders are being trained. The UK, along with our NATO Allies, is committed for the long term to developing the ever more capable Afghan National Security and Defence Forces to ensure Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists.

Lunch with UK personnel who mentor Afghan trainers at the Academy

Since 2014, UK mentoring assistance has helped the ANAOA train over 1500 high quality officers.

The Government committed last year to provide £210 million to the Afghan security forces, until 2020, giving around £70 million a year.

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[Press release: UK's rarest freshwater fish caught on film for the first time](#)

The film was shot on a remote controlled yellow submarine while assessing how much sediment is building up on the bottom of Derwentwater in Cumbria. [Watch it here](#)

Vendace (*coregonus albula*) is the UK's rarest freshwater fish and a relic of the ice age. Its UK habitat is in Derwentwater and like lamprey, Arctic charr, spined loach, allis shad, twaite shad and smelt, it is an international conservation priority.

The Environment Agency carries out regular surveys of water quality around the country and over the past five years has worked with farmers, businesses

and water companies to improve and protect over 15,000km of rivers, lakes, coastal waters and bathing waters. England's rivers are the healthiest they've been for 20 years and salmon, sea trout and other wildlife have returned to many rivers for the first time since the industrial revolution.

Andy Gowans, Environment Agency fisheries specialist, said:

It was a unique moment to capture this iconic fish live on film. Seeing the vendace is a good indication of the health of the lake's water. Derwentwater is the only place these fish inhabit in the UK, so maintaining the quality of the water is vital for their survival.

Dr Ian Winfield, from the [Centre for Ecology & Hydrology](#), who leads the survey on Derwentwater and operated the remote-controlled yellow submarine, said:

As the day closed, I decided I would go out to the deepest part of the lake which is about 20 metres and drop the submarine in. I'm able to view the images from the submarine's filming live and was keen to see what fish showed up.

Although, the vendace came and went within in a matter of seconds, I knew it was a vendace. This was an amazing moment for a scientist, I was not expecting to see one, never mind film one. I knew I had captured for the first time on film the elusive vendace species.

The Environment Agency and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology plan to do further surveying later in the year using more advanced filming technology.

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