

[Dr Nigel Fletcher, Sir David Natzler and Jonathan Scherbel-Ball have been appointed as Members of the Advisory Council for National Records and Archives](#)

Dr Nigel Fletcher

Nigel Fletcher is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Political Economy at King's College London. He was awarded his PhD in 2018 for his thesis on the history of the Official Opposition in the UK, and now teaches on the Politics and Contemporary History MA course at King's.

In 2010 he co-founded the Centre for Opposition Studies, an independent research organisation focused on promoting the study of political opposition. The Centre is launching an annual research conference and is currently working with the University of Bolton to develop innovative postgraduate courses focused on political opposition. As a contemporary historian, Dr Fletcher is an experienced user of the National Archives and other archives across the UK. He has edited a book on political opposition, had several chapters in published works, and is completing a forthcoming monograph based on his doctoral research. He appears regularly in the media to discuss political history, and is a member of both the Royal Historical Society and the Political Studies Association.

He serves as a trustee of Greenwich Theatre, and is a keen supporter of the Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust, which manages the archives and historical collections of the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Sir David Natzler

Sir David had a career of over 40 years in the House of Commons service, much of it engaged in the work of the select committees established in 1979, involving the organisation of inquiries, the search for evidence and the writing of reports. He was for six years the Clerk to the Defence select committee, where the issue of publication of potentially sensitive information was always present. In 2015 he was appointed Clerk of the House of Commons, a Permanent Secretary equivalent post, combining the twin roles of head of the 2500 strong House of Commons service and being the senior adviser to the Speaker and all members of the House on parliamentary practice and procedure and on the constitution. His period as Clerk covered two general elections and the EU referendum.

Sir David retired in 2019. He is currently an Assistant Boundary Commissioner. He lives in Dulwich, south London and is an enthusiastic amateur historian.

Jonathan Scherbel-Ball

Jonathan is a barrister who specialises in media and information law. He has a strong academic interest in 20th century political history, including in particular in Northern Ireland. This includes academic research into the media's historic reporting of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. Jonathan practises law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is currently a member of the Attorney General's "B" Panel of Counsel.

Before being called to the Bar of England and Wales in 2010, Jonathan had qualified as a solicitor. After training at a large US law firm, he subsequently worked for the BBC as in-house lawyer for two years.

Advisory Council Members are remunerated at a rate of £386 per day. This rate is capped at a maximum of 24 days per annum. These appointments have been made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#). The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation or candidature for election. Dr Nigel Fletcher was elected as a Local Councillor in the Royal Borough of Greenwich in May 2018, for the Conservative Party and was Deputy Chairman of the Greenwich Conservative Federation until June 2021. Sir David Natzler and Jonathan Scherbel-Ball declared no activity.

[Business Secretary opens latest meeting of the Critical Minerals Expert Committee](#)

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng today (28 January) opened the latest meeting of the Critical Minerals Expert Committee, chaired by BEIS Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Paul Monks, along with representatives from across academia, finance, industry and government.

The Critical Minerals Expert Committee aims to leverage the UK's extensive research expertise for the development of a Critical Minerals Strategy. It provides high quality, independent advice to the government on certain minerals and metals.

It will also suggest suitable actions the government can take to secure sustainable sources of these critical materials to help maintain national security and meet net zero ambitions.

Metals such as lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements are critically

important for use across a wide range of applications, including electric car batteries, computer hard drives, and high-tech consumer products.

The Business Secretary opened the meeting by reiterating the important role critical minerals play in supplying new green industries, as well as the government's determination that the UK continues to have a resilient, long-term supply chain to deliver a green industrial revolution. He stressed the need to make efficient use of critical minerals and to embed their recycling in the supply chain.

Following the Business Secretary's opening remarks, the committee discussed the development of a UK criticality assessment, which will define a set of critical minerals according to economic vulnerability and security of supply, due to be published later this year.

The committee discussed emerging priorities for the Critical Minerals Strategy, plans for engaging more widely with the sector and the possible scope of the Critical Minerals Intelligence Centre, which will provide ongoing intelligence on the supply of and demand for critical minerals.

The Critical Minerals Strategy will be published later this year and will set out steps to ensure the UK's long-term security of supply for critical minerals. It will help create the conditions needed to grow this vital sector and set out how the UK aims to work with other countries to create international standards and ensure supply chains are robust.

This is the third meeting of the committee, following the first on 2 December 2021, which was attended by Minister Lee Rowley, and a second on 17 December 2021.

The external members of the Critical Minerals Expert Committee include:

- Siân Bradley, Senior Research Fellow, Energy, Environment and Resources Programme, Chatham House
- Professor Paul Ekins OBE, Professor of Resources and Environmental Policy, University College London
- Neil Glover, CEng FIMMM, President, The Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining (IOM3)
- Dr James Goddin, Founder, Hoskins
- Dr Sarah Gordon, CEO, Satarla
- Dr Karen Hanghøj, Director, British Geological Survey
- Professor Richard Herrington, Head of Earth Sciences, Natural History Museum
- Dr Ian Higgins, Managing Director, Less Common Metals
- Dr Ben Jones, Lead Economist, Anglo American
- Simon Moores, Managing Director, Benchmark Mineral Intelligence
- Judith Richardson, Global Purchasing Director, Jaguar Land Rover
- Dr Emma Schofield, PGM Research Fellow, Johnson Matthey
- Isobel Sheldon OBE, Chief Strategy Officer, Britishvolt
- Dr Jessica Sparks, Rights Lab Associate Director, University of Nottingham
- Dr Nigel Steward, Chief Scientist, Rio Tinto

- Julian Treger, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, Anglo Pacific
 - Professor Frances Wall, Camborne School of Mines, University of Exeter
 - Professor Allan Walton, Professor of Critical & Magnetic Materials, Birmingham University
 - Guy Winter, Partner, Fasken
 - Jeremy Wrathall, Founder & CEO, Cornish Lithium
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Government backs vital British Sign Language Bill

The government pledges commitment to improving accessibility for deaf people across the country by backing a vital Bill which will see British Sign Language (BSL) become a recognised language.

The British Sign Language Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Rosie Cooper MP, signals promotion and facilitation of BSL when making public service announcements, encouraging other service providers to do the same.

If passed, it would also see the launch of an advisory board of BSL users to:

- offer guidance to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on how and when to use it
- examine how the DWP goes about increasing the number of BSL interpreters
- make sure the Access to Work scheme better meets the needs of BSL users to support them in employment

Department for Work and Pensions Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith said:

Effective communication is vital to creating a more inclusive and accessible society, and legally recognising British Sign Language in Great Britain is a significant step towards ensuring that deaf people are not excluded from reaching their potential.

Passing the Bill will see government commit to improving the lives of deaf people, and will encourage organisations across the nation to take up the BSL mantle, benefitting both themselves and the deaf community.

BSL offers a lifeline to 250,000 Brits who communicate through the visual medium, which consists of a combination of hand gestures, facial expressions and body language.

The Minister for Disabled People has worked closely with Labour MP Rosie

Cooper and deaf people's organisations, such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) and the British Deaf Association (BDA), to ensure the Bill effectively meets the needs of those who will benefit the most.

Backing the Bill is just one of the steps the government is taking to improve the lives of disabled people and those with long-term health conditions across the UK.

Some of the highlights include:

- the Department for Work and Pensions has launched an Access to Work pilot scheme to help ease the transition from university into employment for disabled graduates
- the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has launched a consultation on flexible working, which has potential to improve accessibility in the workplace
- the Department for Transport has launched a passenger assistance app to make travelling by train easier for wheelchair users

Recent figures from the British Deaf Association suggest that on any day up to 250,000 people use some BSL.

A Private Members Bill on BSL was introduced on 16 June 2021 and will have Second Reading on 28 January 2022.

The Bill is recognising BSL as a language of the UK in its own right supported by a duty on ministerial departments to report their BSL usage on an annual basis.

The Bill also places a requirement on the DWP Secretary of State to issue guidance to ministerial departments on the promotion and facilitation of BSL.

The Bill will be supported by a package of non-legislative measures, including:

- establishing a non statutory advisory board of BSL users to advise the DWP Secretary of State on guidance on BSL
- examining how the government might increase the number of BSL interpreters
- reviewing how DWP might work to ensure the Access to Work fund helps BSL users
- suggesting how we update the National Disability Strategy in our 'one year on' report to facilitate and promote BSL usage

The Access to Work scheme is available to help people who are disabled or have a physical or mental health condition stay in employment and covers those who work from home. It can provide grants up to £62,900 to keep a job accessible.

New working group launched to support tenant farmers

The Environment Secretary has announced an independent review dedicated to looking at how tenant farmers and tenancies can be better supported as farming in England is reformed to be more sustainable.

The Tenancy Working Group will be chaired by Baroness Kate Rock. It will provide tenant farmers and associated stakeholders a further opportunity to make sure the new environmental land management schemes work within agricultural tenancies.

In England, policy is moving away from the arbitrary land-based subsidies and top-down bureaucracy of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. These will be replaced with a new package of schemes that support farmers in their roles as both food producers and stewards of the natural environment.

Defra is working in partnership with farmers, landowners and tenants to design the new schemes and support the choices that they make for their own holdings. This group enhances and complements that ongoing engagement and builds on the successful joint working around the design of the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

For Defra's reforms to agriculture to be successful tenant farmers must be able to fully engage in these schemes and contribute to a more sustainable agricultural sector.

Objectives for the group will be to provide independent advice to include:

- how Defra can use scheme design to facilitate participation of and benefits to tenant farmers in new Government ELMs and related schemes
- consideration of what policy initiatives will secure the long-term sustainability of tenant farming in England
- how best to foster positive and long-term relationships between tenants and landlords
- providing advice on ways to minimise any potential loss of land from the tenanted sector to avoid damaging its resilience; and
- consideration of why it might be necessary to look for new legislative or regulatory powers in the future

A report will be published by the Working Group later this year setting out the main conclusions and providing a set of recommendations to Defra.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice, said:

We are designing our new schemes in partnership with farmers, and this group will focus specifically on the tenanted sector. We want to identify and explore ways to really make sure that our new schemes work for tenant farmers, and the breadth of knowledge and

expertise within this group will allow us to do so.

Baroness Kate Rock, said:

“Tenant farmers are crucial to our farming industry, our farmed environment, and our farming future. Access to the new schemes will be of utmost importance to secure the long-term sustainability of tenant farming in England. I am delighted to be chairing this timely working group and look forward to engaging fully with all stakeholders involved in the tenanted sector.”

Tenant Farmers Association Chief Executive George Dunn said:

“The TFA welcomes this initiative from DEFRA. It is incredibly important that tenant farmers can access the new schemes being developed to replace the Basic Payment Scheme and at the same time we protect against the loss of land from the tenanted sector of agriculture.

“It is hugely important that the new working group is established quickly so that its recommendations can be built into the design of the Environmental Land Management scheme. However, it is also important that the working group looks longer term at issues which may need regulatory, legislative or wider policy change. The TFA has every confidence that Baroness Rock will steer this work with diligence and creativity.”

[Swedish Government approves plans for underground repository for spent nuclear fuel](#)

The licence allows [SKB](#), the developer of the GDF in Sweden, to take final steps and preparations for initial construction of the site.

The process stipulated by the Act on Nuclear Activities can now continue, the first step being a hearing in the Land and Environment Court concerning specific permit conditions for the facility. The case is also referred to the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority for their continued review of SKB’s further work.

The UK’s GDF programme lead Karen Wheeler said:

We’re thrilled to see the [Swedish Government approve plans](#) for an underground repository for spent nuclear fuel at the Forsmark site in Östhammar.

As we make progress at home and engage with communities about a GDF to safely deal with radioactive waste for the long-term, it's encouraging to see progress around the world too.

We will continue to work with international colleagues, incorporate latest knowledge and technologies, and learn from their experience.

In 1992, every local authority in Sweden was invited to take part in the site selection process and the search was eventually narrowed down to 2 communities in Östhammar and Oskarshamn.

Comprehensive site investigations over 5 years, covering geology, hydrology, ecology and social impact, led to a decision in favour of the Forsmark site in Östhammar, close to an existing nuclear power station and where the granite rock is 1.9 billion years old.

Deep underground in Sweden's experimental rock lab at Äspö

Approximately 800 scientific reports were produced during the Forsmark site investigations, 25 cored boreholes were drilled, up to 1,000 metres deep. Altogether, 16 kilometres of drill core samples were extracted.

Residents in both communities had consistently returned strong votes in support of the project.

When fully developed, some time in the 2080s, the repository will comprise around 60 km of tunnels with space for more than 6,000 canisters of spent fuel.

Sweden already operates a repository for shorter-lived radioactive waste, which opened in 1988 and extends to a depth of 50 metres below the seabed of the Baltic. An application to extend this repository was submitted in 2014 and granted by the government in December 2021, following approval by the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority and the Land and Environment Court, as well as the municipality (or local authority) of Östhammar.

RWM has collaborated with overseas partners, including SKB, on numerous research projects, sharing knowledge and pooling resources to ensure its GDF programme is fully aligned with international best practice and the latest technologies.