

Trade Secretary: UK is Africa's investment partner of choice for green transition

- UK to host second Africa Investment Conference with focus on sustainable investment to support continent's transition to clean growth
- Government launches Growth Gateway tool to strengthen UK and African business relationships, following record £2.3bn support from UK Export Finance
- Video address from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to open virtual event attended by UK and African ministers, business leaders and WTO Director-General

The UK is holding the second Africa Investment Conference today (20 January 2022) to boost economic cooperation with African nations and enhance its role as the continent's investment partner of choice for greener, climate-friendly projects.

Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan is hosting the one-day virtual event which aims to unlock millions of pounds of new investment, especially in clean energy industries in both the UK and across Africa.

In a 'virtual fireside talk' with WTO Director General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Trade Secretary will say sustainable trade and investment are crucial for reducing global inequality, improving economies, raising incomes and creating jobs.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Two years on from the inaugural UK-Africa Investment Summit, the UK's ambition to be Africa's investment partner of choice has never been stronger.

The continent has huge economic potential and our continued partnership will help businesses capitalise on investment opportunities, support high-value jobs and boost enterprise in every part of the UK.

This year's Conference focuses on the importance of resilient, sustainable investment to support Africa as it pivots towards a more environmentally friendly growth trajectory, and I look forward to working with leaders from the continent as they continue on this path to a greener future.

Following the UK's hosting of COP26, this year's conference will explore how investment can serve to help Africa's transition to a cleaner and greener

growth trajectory.

As a sign of the growing partnership between the two regions in the clean growth space, UK sustainable battery technology firm Aceleron has secured an investment deal with Mobility 54 Investment SAS, a subsidiary of Toyota Group, as part of its £5m Series A funding round to accelerate the development and use of sustainable batteries in Africa.

Alongside the environmental benefits, increased trade and investment with developing countries creates opportunities for UK firms and consumers – for example, lowering prices, and opening fast-growing markets for UK exporters.

To enhance UK-Africa partnerships, the UK is today launching a new Growth Gateway – a digital tool to link African and British businesses to UK Government trade, finance and investment services and opportunities.

The service provides practical online support to businesses in Africa that want to export to and invest in the UK, and businesses in the UK that want to export to and invest in Africa, backed up by a team of trade and investment specialists.

It follows an increased effort across government to facilitate UK-Africa trade, including that of UK Export Finance (UKEF). The UK's export credit agency has significantly increased support for markets in Africa in the past year from approximately £600 million in 2018-19 to over £2.3 billion in 2020-21, supporting a range of infrastructure projects in countries from Côte d'Ivoire to Uganda.

Minister for Investment Gerry Grimstone said:

At the first UK-Africa Investment Summit, the Prime Minister stated his intention to make the UK Africa's investment partner of choice.

This year's Conference is a key part of that legacy, bringing our business communities together to make the case for a closer investment partnership with a renewed focus on sustainability and clean growth.

Minister for Africa Vicky Ford said:

The UK is deepening our economic ties with countries across Africa. This conference is a fantastic opportunity to bring British and African businesses together to unlock millions of pounds of new investment, especially in clean energy industries in both the UK and across Africa.

There is so much more that the UK and African countries can do together. Growth Gateway will make it easier than ever for African and British businesses to access the support they need to boost two-way trade and investment.

Last year's virtual conference was attended by over 2,800 delegates from over 40 African countries and across the UK.

Vimal Seeboruth, General Manager at electric vehicle manufacturer Arrival Ltd, said:

The Conference [in 2021] was excellent and a great way to bring UK and African business together.

By attending we got a much better understanding of the support mechanisms and points of contact for us to use in developing our business in Africa.

Notes to editors

- The Africa Investment Conference aligns with the UK's aims to promote trade and investment as a driver of economic growth that can trigger positive changes in a country's economy, helping to raise incomes, create jobs and lift people out of poverty.
- It is set to bring together over 4,000 registered delegates for a series of panel discussions and match-making opportunities, and represents the lasting legacy of the UK-Africa Investment Summit hosted in London by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in 2020, where 27 trade and investment deals worth £6.5bn and further commitments worth £8.9 billion were announced.
- The Secretary of State will appear alongside a renowned cast of speakers including World Trade Organization Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretary General H. E. Wamkele Mene, Dr Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations, UK Minister for Investment Lord Grimstone, and UK Minister for Africa Vicky Ford MP.

Accountability is vital to ending the cycle of violence in Darfur

Madam President, I thank the Prosecutor for his briefing to this Council, and for the thirty-fourth report on the Situation in Darfur pursuant to Security Resolution 1593.

Firstly, the UK would like to welcome the confirmation of charges in the case of Mr Abd-Al-Rahman. More than sixteen years after the Security Council referred the Situation in Darfur to the Prosecutor, this is a positive development and sign of the patient and tireless work that is required to

deliver justice.

We also welcome the continued attention and priority placed on the Situation in Darfur, demonstrated by the Prosecutor's first official visit to Sudan in August. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, as well as the Government's commitment to facilitate a full time presence of the Office in country, were potentially indicative of the wider positive gains on justice and human rights since the 2019 revolution.

Madam President, it is however regrettable that the military coup on 25 October has placed such progress at risk. The interruption of investigative activities in Sudan has been a significant setback to the Court's efforts to deliver justice for the people of Darfur.

We therefore urge the Sudanese authorities to build on the previous positive engagement with the Court and the commitments made by various parties, including the Memorandum of Understanding and Sudan's obligations under Resolution 1593.

The UK echoes the Court's requests for access to evidence, archives and witnesses, and unfettered access to territory in Sudan, including crime scenes in Darfur.

As detailed by the Prosecutor in his report, the situation in Darfur continues to be characterised by increasing violence, resulting in the deaths and large-scale displacement of civilians. This already fragile situation has been further exacerbated by the ongoing political crisis following the October coup.

Accountability for past human rights violations has a vital contribution to make in ending the cycle of violence and addressing the root causes of conflict. In this regard, we urge the Sudanese authorities to fully cooperate with the Court.

Finally, Madam President, I would like to commend the efforts of the Prosecutor and his team to help deliver justice for the people of Darfur for past crimes. The UK stands ready to assist the ICC in facilitating the four ICC warrants which remain outstanding in the Darfur situation, and calls for the surrender of Mr Banda who remains a fugitive from the Court.

Thank you.

Unilateral actions risk undermining engagement between Israeli Government

and Palestinian leadership

Thank you Madam President.

Before I start I'd like to stress, as my Foreign Secretary has said, the United Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks of 17 January, claimed by the Houthis against civilian sites in Abu Dhabi. We extend our condolences to the victims and their families.

Turning to the topic of today's discussion, my thanks to the Special Coordinator for his briefing. I'd like also to thank our two briefers from EcoPeace. You have demonstrated today how climate and environmental impacts can be both a source of insecurity but also a driver of cooperation between communities. The United Kingdom supports your call for greater regional cooperation on joint environmental threats. The solar-water agreement between Israel, Jordan and the UAE in November illustrates the value of such efforts.

Madam President, I wanted to pay thanks to Norway for your leadership on economic coordination between the parties. Including chairing, in November, the first in-person Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in two years. Both parties committed there to enhancing dialogue and expressed a willingness to reinvigorate the long-stalled Joint Economic Committee. The UK calls on both parties to advance these goals as we approach the next Ad Hoc Liaison Committee this coming March.

The UK welcomes continued engagement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including direct meetings between Defence Minister Gantz and President Abbas, and discussions between the Ministries of Finance aimed at improving the economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Such direct engagement is vital given the scale of the current challenges. We urge Israel and the PA to accelerate efforts to improve the financial situation and the economic and humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and Gaza. We welcome the appointment of new Palestinian Ministers of the Interior and Awqaf and continue to urge the Palestinian Authority to deliver reforms towards greater accountability, transparency and efficacy.

Madam President, on 17 January British diplomats witnessed the attempted eviction of the Salhia family who live and run a business in Sheikh Jarrah. Earlier this morning authorities returned to demolish their home and arrested members of the family. We again urge the Government of Israel to cease such policies. Evictions are against international humanitarian law in all but the most exceptional circumstances, and cause unnecessary suffering.

Also on 17 January, as we have heard, approval was given to the 'lower aqueduct' settlement plan representing nearly 1,500 housing units, some of which fall outside the Green Line, and to be built between Givat Hamatos and Har Homa. Madam President, we urge the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity, which heightens tension

and threatens the viability of a future Palestinian state.

The UK condemns the attempted stabbing attack on an IDF soldier in the West Bank on 17 January. This incident follows several attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers at the end of last year. We call for the parties to work together to condemn violence and minimise tension.

Stability in Gaza remains a focus for the UK. We condemn the firing of missiles from Gaza towards Israel at the start of January and we urge all sides to work to sustain the calm.

Madam President, we urge both parties to avoid unilateral actions harmful to peace, which risk undermining the engagement between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership I referred to at the beginning of my statement. We call on both parties to work together to create the foundations for future progress towards a two-state solution.

Health Secretary statement from COVID-19 press conference

Good afternoon and welcome.

Today marks the start of the next chapter in this country's fight against COVID-19.

A few hours ago, the Prime Minister announced that thanks to the progress we've all made we will be lifting the Plan B measures and returning to our original Plan A.

This is a moment that we can all be proud of.

The culmination of a brilliant national mission that's helped us to withstand the Omicron wave and restore more freedom to this country.

It's a reminder of what this country can accomplish when we all work together.

We'll shortly be hearing from the Chief Medical Advisor to the UK Health Security Agency Dr Susan Hopkins but before we do, I wanted to talk about how we got to this important milestone and what this means for our fight against this virus.

Let's start with how we got here.

Back in July, we made the decision to take Step 4 of our roadmap so we could roll back the restrictions and move closer to normal life. This wasn't an easy decision but taking this step when we did backed by the warmer weather

and the school holidays. It helped us to enjoy the greatest possible freedom for a number of months.

As I said when I announced this change, this showed us how we can learn to live with COVID.

But I also warned that a more harmful new variant would have the potential to set us back.

Four months later our scientists, learning from their colleagues in South Africa, were among the first in the world to help identify a new variant of Omicron.

A variant that was capable of spreading faster than any COVID-19 variant that had come before it.

Spurred by this more transmissible variant, case numbers rose to record levels and incredibly, over a third of the UK's total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases happened over the last eight weeks.

There was a lot that we didn't know about Omicron.

But we did know that we were in a stronger position than the previous winter thanks to that decision to open up in the summer, and to the solid defences that we've built over time.

So we decided not to return to the lockdown measures, as many countries in Europe have.

Because I've always been extremely conscious of the impact that blanket restrictions can have, for instance on jobs, on education and mental health.

Instead, we pursued a different path. One that allowed us to take a balanced and proportionate approach.

We put in place the Plan B contingency measures that were set out in our Autumn and Winter Plan.

These measures left us with far fewer restrictions than most in Europe, and they bought us valuable time. Time that we could use to assess the Omicron variant and reinforce this country's pharmaceutical defences.

Since we announced Plan B, 15 million people have stepped forward to get their boosters.

We've smashed records again and again, including a record 1.06 million UK vaccinations in a single day. We've also massively expanded our capacity for testing, and we expect to have some 400 million lateral flow tests available this month alone – that's quadruple our pre-Omicron plans.

On top of this, we've secured even more antivirals and treatments, and deployed them directly to those people with the highest risk. Thanks to this huge collective effort, we're more boosted than any large country in Europe,

we've created the largest testing programme of any country in Europe and we've procured more antivirals than any country in Europe. That's why we're the most open country in Europe, and today we announced how we have announced plans to go even further.

Our plan was to use the time that Plan B gave us, to give ourselves extra power in our fight against Omicron. This plan has worked, and the data shows that Omicron is in retreat.

Today's ONS data shows a fall in infections, including in older age groups.

Hospitalisations have also fallen over the past week, and the number of COVID patients in intensive care beds is now at the same level as it was back in July.

I've always said that we'd open up the country as soon as the data supports it, and earlier today that's why we announced three important changes as part of our return to Plan A.

First, starting immediately, the government is ending the guidance on working from home, and I know that many people have already been starting to talk to their employers about arrangements to return safely to work.

Second, from the start of next Thursday, mandatory certification based on vaccines and tests will end, but of course, organisations can still choose to use the NHS COVID Pass voluntarily.

Third, also starting next Thursday, we'll no longer legally mandate the wearing of face masks.

But we suggest that they are worn in enclosed, crowded places, especially where you come into contact with people who you don't normally meet.

These changes will take effect even sooner in classrooms, where we will no longer require face coverings from tomorrow, and the Department for Education will shortly remove the guidance on their use in communal areas.

As well as these changes, we're also exploring where else we can ease restrictions.

We're looking to replace legal requirements on self-isolation with advice and guidance and, in the coming days, I'll be setting out our plans to further ease restrictions on visits to care homes.

The steps that we've announced today represent a major milestone. But it's not the end of the road, and we shouldn't see this as the finish line.

Because we cannot eradicate this virus, and its future variants. Instead, we must learn to live with COVID, in the same way that we've learnt to live with flu, and we'll be setting out our long term plan for living with COVID-19 this Spring.

We must stay vigilant, and be mindful that there could be bumps in the road

ahead.

Although we've worked hard to make sure the NHS will be ready and resilient, building Nightingale surge hubs, and signing new deals with the independent sector, it is still facing significant pressure this winter. Even before the Omicron wave we had a COVID backlog of elective care, and now unfortunately that COVID backlog will be larger still. So we must proceed with caution.

A pandemic is a marathon not a sprint. Even on this day of progress, I'd urge everyone to think about what they can do to keep the virus at bay. Whether it's washing your hands, letting in fresh air, or getting tested and self-isolating if you test positive.

But the best step that we can all take is to get vaccinated. It was the jabs that have got us this far, and the jabs can keep us here too.

I'm so grateful to all the staff and volunteers and the military, everyone who made the rollout a reality, and to everyone who stepped up to get your jab.

We asked you to come forward, and you did, in your millions, and it's because of you that we've been able to take these steps today.

But for as long as there are people who haven't been protected, we know that our defences aren't as strong as they should be, and the NHS will be under more pressure than it should be.

So please: if you haven't had your first, second or third jab, it's time to come forward.

Help us to keep this success story going, and protect the incredible progress that we've all made.

Now I'd like to hand over to Susan to talk us through some of the latest data

[England to return to Plan A following the success of the booster programme](#)

- People will no longer be advised to work from home, face coverings will no longer be mandatory in indoor venues, and organisations will be able to choose whether to require NHS Covid Passes
- Vaccination remains our best defence against COVID-19 and people are urged to Get Boosted Now

The government has today announced that England will fully return to Plan A on Thursday 27 January thanks to the success of the booster programme, with ministers urging anyone who has still not had a top-up jab to come forward and Get Boosted Now.

On 8 December, the Prime Minister announced a move to Plan B following the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

The measures introduced helped to control the spread of COVID-19, bought time to assess the variant and allowed the NHS to rapidly expand the booster programme to strengthen defences.

While vaccinations remain a priority, the success of the vaccination programme so far means we are now able to cautiously return to Plan A in England.

This means from now (Wednesday 19 January):

- The government is no longer asking people to work from home if they can. People should speak to their employers about arrangements for returning to the office, and should follow the Working Safely guidance.

From tomorrow (Thursday 20 January):

- Face coverings will no longer be advised in classrooms for both staff and pupils.

From Thursday 27 January:

- Venues and events will no longer be required by law to use the NHS Covid Pass. The NHS Covid Pass can still be used on a voluntary basis as was previously the case in Plan A.
- Face coverings are no longer required by law in any setting. Public health guidance will remain in place, suggesting individuals should continue to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces, where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
- The Department for Education will remove national guidance on the use of face coverings in communal areas, with local Directors of Public Health able to recommend the use of face coverings in education settings across their area only where the department and public health experts judge the measure to be proportionate due to specific health concerns. This is a temporary measure and Directors of Public Health continue to advise individual settings experiencing outbreaks.
- Any local introduction of face coverings must be subject to routine review and removed at the earliest opportunity.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has maintained a balanced approach to COVID-19 measures, considering the freedoms of individuals together with the public health concerns of COVID-19. Although the government is able to remove blanket restrictions, prevalence of COVID-19 is still high with over 16,000 people in hospital in England with the infection. As such individuals, employers and local leaders are urged to act cautiously and consider the risk of COVID-19 when moving back to Plan A. The guidance on gov.uk will be updated accordingly.

Due to the success of the booster programme, with over 30.5 million boosters given in England, the situation continues to improve.

The latest data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that getting a booster is 89% effective in preventing hospitalisation from COVID-19 from two weeks after it is administered and is 65 to 75% effective against symptomatic infection from Omicron.

Vaccinations remain our best defence against COVID-19 and in December the Prime Minister launched a national appeal to Get Boosted Now. The government met its target of offering every eligible adult a booster jab by Christmas and now more than 4 in 5 (81%) of eligible adults in England have had their booster.

Over 90% of people aged 12 and above have had their first dose and over 83% have had their second. The government recently provided an extra £22.5 million to councils for Community Vaccine Champions to help drive uptake in harder-to-reach communities.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“Today marks the start of the next chapter in this country’s fight against COVID-19.

“Our plan was to use the time that Plan B gave us to give ourselves extra power in our fight against Omicron. That plan has worked, and the data shows that Omicron is in retreat.

“But it’s not the end of the road and we shouldn’t see this as the finish line. The best step that we can all take is to get vaccinated. It was the jabs that have got us this far, and the jabs can keep us here too”.

The vaccine programme is being bolstered by the development of world-leading antiviral treatments. In December, the Prime Minister confirmed a new national PANORAMIC study where 10,000 UK patients at risk of serious illness from COVID-19 will be given molnupiravir to treat their symptoms at home.

Testing also remains a vital tool in controlling the spread of COVID-19 and has allowed the government to take a proportionate approach to restoring individual freedoms.

Thanks to the accessibility of lateral flow tests (LFT), people self-isolating with COVID-19 can now end their isolation after five full days, provided they test negative on day 5 and 6. Contacts who are fully vaccinated

can also avoid isolation by testing daily with LFTs and most of those who test positive on a LFT no longer have to confirm their case with a PCR test.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

“Face-to-face education for all students has consistently been my priority, and that is why I am removing face coverings from classrooms – as promised – on the earliest possible date, making sure there is as little disruption to students’ learning as possible.

“National guidance to wear face coverings in communal areas will also be removed in line with the national move out of Plan B.

“Although we can take this action because we know the risk from Omicron is lower, the virus is still with us and proportionate protective measures remain vital to protect education. My message remains the same as ever – testing and vaccinations are our best weapons against the virus – keep testing, and get your vaccination as soon as possible.”

Chief Medical Advisor for the UK Health Security Agency, Dr Susan Hopkins said:

“The recent decline in community case rates and individuals requiring hospitalisation is encouraging and it’s thanks to the public, who have taken up vaccination and followed the Plan B measures closely, that we’ve got to this point.

“However we should not be complacent. The pandemic is not over yet and we will need to remain cautious to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

“I encourage everyone to get the vaccine as soon as they can, to continue testing regularly with LFTs – particularly before periods of high risk and before seeing anyone who is vulnerable – and to take a PCR test if they have symptoms.”

Government will set out a long term strategy for living with COVID-19 in due course.