

Ministerial appointments: 19 December 2021

Press release

The Queen has been pleased to approve the following appointments.



The Foreign Secretary is to become lead negotiator with the EU on the Northern Ireland Protocol, following the departure of Lord Frost.

Liz Truss will take over Ministerial responsibility for the UK's relationship with the European Union with immediate effect.

She will become the UK's co-chair of the Partnership Council and the Joint Committee, and will lead the ongoing negotiations to resolve the problems arising from the current operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Chris Heaton-Harris will become Minister of State for Europe and will deputise for the Foreign Secretary as necessary on EU Exit and the Protocol.

The Queen has been pleased to approve the following appointments:

- Chris Heaton-Harris MP to be a Minister of State (Minister for Europe) in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
- Wendy Morton MP to be a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Transport

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[£22.5m of funding announced in new](#)

community push to get nation boosted now

- Additional £22.5 million to help areas with low vaccine uptake encourage hard to reach people to come forward
- Army of vaccine ambassadors deployed in run up to Christmas in popular areas including Liverpool One, Brighton Pier and King's Cross
- Part of urgent appeal launched by the Prime Minister and NHS England to Get Boosted Now

An additional £22.5 million in funding and an army of vaccine ambassadors have been deployed across the country to encourage vaccine uptake in the run up to Christmas and the New year.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has today (19 December 2021) announced it will be giving £22.5 million to councils to encourage people to come forward and get vaccinated. The Community Vaccines Champion scheme will target 60 local authorities with the lowest vaccine uptake.

It will be used to run events in communities across the country to make sure everyone has access to the most accurate and up-to-date health advice, and fund pop-up vaccination centres in places of worship. This includes in North Lincolnshire where an Imam has run pop-up vaccination clinics and information sessions in his Mosque, and in Great Yarmouth, Community Champions have made doorstep calls in areas where vaccination rates are low.

The community Vaccine Champions will tap into their local networks to provide advice about COVID-19 and the vaccines. Champions will also work with councils to identify barriers to accessing accurate information and to provide tailored support, such as phone calls for people who are digitally excluded, helplines, and linking to GP surgeries.

Around 900 people will also form 'street teams' and visit 21 popular areas across England, including Liverpool One Shopping Centre, King's Cross Station and Brighton Pier, every day from today (19 December) to Christmas Eve to urge people to get their jabs to secure vital protection against the virus amid rising cases of Omicron.

A series of initiatives, such as a travelling vaccine bus, extra pop-up sites and new vaccine centres in prominent locations will make it as easy as possible for people to get their jabs. The teams will be distributing leaflets on the Get Boosted Now campaign, as well as information on testing and advice to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the run up to Christmas.

It comes as the UK hits 26 million boosters and third doses administered following a rapid acceleration of the vaccination programme.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We are in a race between the virus and vaccine and we are doing everything in our power to get jabs in arms as quickly as possible.

We are calling on people to Get Boosted Now as part of our national mission to reinforce our wall of defence against the rapid spread of Omicron.

I want to thank the thousands of people who have heroically stepped up to support our vaccine drive. We're all in this together – please play your part.

Each team of vaccine ambassadors will have a branded van, six staff, banners and leaflets containing information on vaccines and COVID-19. The teams are comprised of people who speak 33 different languages between them.

They will cover the entire country – from Newcastle to Brighton – in areas where there is likely to be a large number of people, including council-organised Christmas activities, supermarkets, train stations.

Vaccines Minister, Maggie Throup said:

It is extremely important everybody gets their COVID-19 vaccine now – whether this be your first, second or booster dose.

Vaccines are the best way we can protect ourselves and a booster will strengthen your immunity against the new variant which is quickly spreading across the country.

Thank you to all the selfless people for stepping up to join this crucial national mission.

More than 14,000 volunteers have joined the [Community Champions scheme](#) – helping the vulnerable and isolated across the country throughout the pandemic. The government is now building on this success and launching the Community Vaccine Champions scheme – with local people using their trusted voice to encourage people in their community to come forward and get vaccinated.

Faith Minister Kemi Badenoch MP said:

In the past year I have seen first-hand the outstanding work of councils, faith groups, the community and voluntary sector up and down the country helping the people in their local areas during the pandemic.

It is vital we now build on that success as we encourage everyone to Get Boosted Now in the fight against Omicron.

The funding will also support areas to tackle misinformation and encourage

take-up as the vaccination programme continues across the country.

Data published by the UK Health Security Agency shows vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection is substantially reduced against Omicron with just two doses over time, but a third dose boosts protection back up to over 70%.

In response the government and NHS England launched an urgent national appeal to Get Boosted Now. This includes advertising across TV and out of home calling on people to book their jabs.

A total of 750 armed forces personnel have been drafted in to support deployment of booster vaccines across the UK and extra vaccine centres and pop-up sites have opened to make it as easy as possible for people to get vaccinated.

Emily Benbow, a Street Team member, said:

It's so important to get vaccinated which is why I'm working with the NHS and speaking to the public on the ground and reminding them of the importance of getting vaccinated.

I'm really proud to be supporting the drive, it's never been more important to get vaccinated so please get boosted now and if you're in one of the Street Team locations come and say hi and learn more about the vaccines!

Both booster vaccines – Pfizer and Moderna – increase the immune response substantially and show good effectiveness, although with some reduction compared to Delta.

All adults are now eligible for their booster, provided it has been at least three months since their second jab. People can visit a walk-in centre or book via the National Booking Service.

[Plans to phase out the use of peat in the amateur horticulture sector](#)

Plans to ban the use of peat in horticulture in England and Wales by the end of this Parliament were set out by the Government today (Saturday 18 December) in an effort to protect precious peatland habitats and meet net zero targets.

Peatlands are the UK's largest carbon store and are routinely dug up in the UK for horticultural purposes, such as for growing media. Bagged retail

growing media accounts for 70% of the peat sold in the UK. When this extraction takes place, the carbon stored inside the bog is released as carbon dioxide, contributing to climate change.

Peat extraction also degrades the state of the wider peatland landscape, damaging habitats for rare species of flora and fauna, and negatively impacting peat's ability to prevent flooding and filter water.

In a consultation published today, the Government has set out measures to phase out the sale of peat and peat-containing products in the amateur sector by the end of this Parliament. Organisations with an interest in peatland protection, horticultural businesses and associations, and those who import and export peat products, are being asked for their views on new measures to end the use of peat products in horticulture.

The 12-week consultation is also seeking views on:

- Introducing *point-of-sale measures for bagged growing media*, such as a point-of-sale charge for the purchase of any growing media bag containing peat; and mandatory labelling and point-of-sale material containing detail of the environmental reasons for eschewing products containing peat.
- Mandatory reporting of the volume of peat sold for all sellers of peat and peat containing products.
- Potential exemptions, including for scientific purposes and a maximum amount of peat allowed in certain products, which will need to be strictly defined and enforced to prevent exploitation.

Sustainable alternatives to peat which are of comparable quality to peat-based products are currently available. These are often made up of peat-free materials derived from more sustainable sources, for example wood fibre and bark, green compost, wool, coir and other materials.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Our peatlands are an incredibly valuable natural resource. They play a crucial role in locking up carbon, provide habitats for wildlife and help with flood mitigation.

The amateur gardening sector has made huge strides in reducing peat use and there are now more sustainable and good quality peat-free alternatives available than at any other time, so I am confident now is the right time to make the shift permanent.

Today's consultation directly contributes towards the Government's net zero carbon emissions target. The protection of our peatlands will also help us deliver on commitments in the 25 Year Environment Plan whilst also preserving these landscapes for future

generations.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

Our peatlands exemplify the multiple benefits society can reap from healthy natural systems. Healthy peatlands are among our most precious habitats, offering a home to some of our scarcest plants and animals. They comprise diverse landscapes too, located not only in our remote uplands but also in lowland areas, such as fens.

Peatlands are also among our most beautiful landscapes, including in the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, that we hope even more people will enjoy during the years ahead. By restoring peatlands, we can protect and increase all of these valuable benefits.

We are proud to be able to deliver the next round of funding for the Discovery Grants, which will unlock barriers faced for smaller, up and coming projects and will make a major difference to protecting these precious habitats. This will contribute to building a wider Nature Recovery Network across the entire country.

Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths said:

The protection of our peatlands is an important element of our Net Zero plans. They are a valued and precious part of our landscape, and play a vital role in capturing carbon. With many alternatives to peat available for amateur gardeners, it is a good time to look at making the shift from using peat in our gardens and to launch this consultation. We are already supporting projects to restore and protect our peatlands in Wales through our five year National Peatland Action Programme (NPAP), which I launched in November of last year. In the first year alone of the NPAP, we have invested over £1.5m in capital funding ensuring over 650ha of peatlands are on a restoration pathway.

The Government has also today awarded funding of over £4 million to help groups develop new projects seeking to restore peatland systems to a natural and healthy state at a landscape scale. The funding will be delivered by Natural England and will help unlock barriers to peatland restoration, enabling projects that would struggle to gain funding to be in a position to apply for future rounds of peat restoration funding. Grants have been awarded to 10 projects from across the country including in the Fens, Dorset, Somerset and Yorkshire.

Some of these projects are:

- Working closely with landowners across three Internal Drainage Boards, the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) aims to use the funding to unlock barriers to restoration and develop proposals for a further Nature for Climate Peatland Grant for 500-1,500 ha of agriculturally-managed lowland fen peatland within a total area of 11,220 hectares in Cambridgeshire.
- The Broads Authority in Norfolk is working on the Broads Peatland Partnership to develop a whole new approach to peat management and carbon storage in The Broads; rewetting degraded peat, adopting paludiculture* and delivering additional ecosystem benefits.
- The Moors for the Future Partnership aims to develop restoration plans for 63 individual sites across the Dark Peak, Southern Pennines, West Pennines and South West Peak Staffordshire Moorlands, covering 37,614 ha of upland catchment habitat. The work will include addressing knowledge gaps in the peat resource and extensive stakeholder engagement to contribute to restoration project planning and development.

With only 13% of peatland in a near-natural state in England, Government announced the [England Peat Action Plan](#) earlier this year, setting out plans to restore, sustainably manage and protect peatlands. This will enable the restoration of at least 35,000 hectares of peatland by 2025, supported by the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme. The Government has also invested £2.7 million in the Great North Bog, a large-scale peatland restoration initiative across our sweeping expanse of blanket bog in the north of England.

Today's announcement is part of the Government's commitments to tackle the twin threat of biodiversity and climate change. The Environment Act will deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth and drive forward action to protect nature and improve biodiversity, including through a target for species abundance for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature.

Further information

- The consultation closes on 18th March and [can be found online at this link](#)
- Paludiculture is the practice of farming on wet land, such as rewetted bogs and fens. It offers many benefits such as climate change mitigation through avoiding Nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide emissions and provision of cool humid air

[More than half of over 18s boosted](#)

against COVID-19

- 50% of adult population has now had a booster following record daily totals
- Booster provides protection against Omicron
- All eligible urged to book and get booster as soon as possible to protect themselves and family this winter

More than 50% of the adult UK population are now boosted after the programme was accelerated this week to offer the jab to everyone aged over 18.

A total of 26.3 million have received a top-up jab in the UK – making it one of the fastest rollouts in the world.

Vaccines are the best way to protect people against COVID-19 and data from the UK Health Security Agency shows a booster vaccine increases protection against symptomatic infection from the Omicron variant to around 70%.

This week, online bookings opened to all those aged over 18, as well as walk-in sites across the country including at many hospitals, pharmacies, pop-ups and football stadiums.

Secretary of State Sajid Javid said:

We're making excellent progress in our national mission to get all adults in the UK boosted as soon as possible – but we need to go even further.

Vaccines are our best shot at tackling the Omicron variant – and it is vital people come forward to protect themselves, their loved ones and their community this winter.

It is very encouraging to see record breaking milestones and booster bookings – but I urge all of those who have not yet done so to book their booster or find a walk-in centre to Get Boosted Now.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Thank you to everyone in the NHS, thousands of volunteers, the Armed Forces, and all those who have been involved or come forward for your booster already.

We need everyone to step forward in this national mission to Get Boosted Now and get the best possible protection against the Omicron variant.

Do not delay. Book your booster today – it might be the most important thing you do this winter.

In order to speed up the vaccine rollout across the UK, a total of 750 armed forces personnel have been drafted in to support deployment of booster vaccines, tens of thousands of volunteers have stepped up to support the national mission, and extra vaccine centres and pop-up sites have opened to make it as easy as possible for people to get vaccinated.

The 15-minute observation following a Pfizer or Moderna booster jabs was also temporarily suspended where clinically safe and appropriate to do so.

Anyone over the age of 18 can have their booster three months after their second dose, and bookings can be made one month in advance.

Dr Emily Lawson, head of the NHS vaccination programme, said:

Thanks to the dedication and determination of our NHS staff, aided by our fantastic volunteers, the NHS Covid Vaccination Programme has now given a vital booster to half of all eligible adults over 18 ahead of Christmas, including more than 21 million in England.

As the NHS ramps up capacity to deliver boosters at an unprecedented rate, I would urge anyone yet to book in for their life-saving booster to do so at the earliest opportunity – it is the best way to guarantee yourself and your loved protections this winter.

[PM call with First Minister of Scotland: 17 December 2021](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon.



The Prime Minister has spoken to First Minister Nicola Sturgeon this afternoon to discuss the ongoing response to the Omicron variant.

The Prime Minister and the First Minister agreed on the importance of close collaboration for the benefit of citizens across the UK.

They discussed the shared challenges including the economic disruption caused by Covid and will continue to work together.

The Prime Minister confirmed UK Government will be convening a COBR meeting over the weekend with counterparts from the devolved administrations to continue discussions.

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