

Our vaccination programme is a national success story

Today marks 12 weeks since Margaret Keenan became the first person in the world to receive a clinically approved vaccine for COVID-19. She has since been joined by over 20 million other citizens of this country in the biggest and fastest vaccination effort the world has ever seen.

This is a phenomenal achievement. Our vaccination programme is a national success story for the whole United Kingdom, and the reason it matters is that it allows us to replace the protection currently given by restrictions on our freedoms with the protection from science.

The data confirms that this strategy is working because the vaccines work. The number of hospital admissions is falling faster than the number of new cases, whereas in the first peak it fell more slowly, and the fall in hospitalisations is faster among the age groups vaccinated first than in younger age groups yet to get a jab.

I can tell the House about some further analysis that backs up this excellent news. The halving time of hospital admissions is now every 18 days. Over the past fortnight, it has fallen for those aged over 85 from 18 days to 15. This morning, the Office for National Statistics published data showing the number of deaths falling by over a quarter a week in mid-February. More than that, the number of deaths each day is not only falling faster than after the first peak, but it is falling faster in the over-80s, who got the jab first, compared with the under-80s.

The number of daily deaths is halving every 12 days, but among the over-80s it is now halving every 10, so while the fall in cases is decelerating, the fall in the number of deaths is accelerating. What all this shows is that the vaccine is working, reducing the number of deaths among those who were vaccinated first and preventing hospital admissions. This is real-world evidence that the vaccine is protecting the NHS and saving lives, that the 12-week dosing regime is saving lives, and that this country's strategy is working.

As well as this real-world data, I would like to update the House on 2 new pieces of analytical research published over the last 24 hours. First, this morning the Office for National Statistics published new data on the levels of protection people have. They show that up to 11 February, 1 in 4 people are estimated to have antibodies against coronavirus in England, up from 1 in 5. The levels are highest in the over-80s, the first group to be vaccinated, showing again the protection from the vaccine across the country.

The second piece of research, published last night, shows that a single dose of either the Oxford or the Pfizer vaccine delivers protection against severe infection in the over-70s, with a more than 80% reduction in hospitalisations. It is great news that both vaccines work so effectively. In

fact, the protection from catching COVID 35 days after the first jab is even slightly better for the Oxford jab than for the Pfizer, so people can have confidence that they will get protection, whichever jab they are offered.

I am grateful for the work of colleagues across the House in promoting vaccine take-up, which has helped to deliver some of the highest levels of enthusiasm for vaccination in the whole world, and I am pleased to inform the House that we are now inviting over-60s to be vaccinated too. Although the day-to-day figures for supply are lumpy, we have some bumper weeks ahead later this month. Given that our vaccination programme began 12 weeks ago today, from now we begin in earnest our programme of second vaccinations, which ramps up over the month of March. I can assure the House that we have factored these second jabs into our supply projections, and we are on track to meet our target of offering a vaccine to all priority groups 1 to 9 by 15 April and to all adults by the end of July.

Our vaccination programme means that we can set out our road map to freedom and put this pandemic behind us – but we must stay vigilant because COVID-19, like all viruses, mutates over time. Part of controlling any virus is responding to new variants as they arise, just as we do with flu each year. Knowing this, we invested in genomic sequencing right at the start of the pandemic, giving the UK one of the biggest genomic sequencing capabilities in the world. Thanks to that, we have been able to spot variants here at home and support others to detect variants in other parts of the world.

I would like to update the House on the 6 cases of the variant of concern that was first identified in Manaus in Brazil and that we have now identified here in the UK. We know that 5 of those 6 people quarantined at home, as they were legally required to do. We have been in contact with them, and I would like to put on record my gratitude to them for doing their duty and following the rules. Whenever we identify cases of a new variant, we respond fast and come down hard by bringing in enhanced sequencing and testing, so we are stepping up our testing and sequencing in south Gloucestershire as a precaution. We have no information to suggest that the variant has spread further.

Unfortunately, 1 of the 6 cases completed a test but did not successfully complete the contact details. Incidents like this are rare and occur only in around 0.1% of tests. I can update the House with the latest information on identifying this case. We have identified the batch of home test kits in question, and our search has narrowed from the whole country down to 379 households in the south east of England. We are contacting each one. We are grateful that a number of potential cases have come forward following the call that we put out over the weekend, and I would like to thank colleagues from across the House who have helped us to get the message out there.

Our current vaccines have not yet been studied against this variant. We are working to understand what impact it might have, but we do know that the variant has caused significant challenges in Brazil, so we are doing all we can to stop the spread of this new variant in the UK, to analyse its effects, to develop an updated vaccine that works on all these variants of concern, and to protect the progress that we have made as a nation. This country is on

the road to recovery and we have freedom on the horizon. We must proceed with caution because although we are moving quickly, the virus moves quickly too. Let us not waver. Let us do whatever it takes to keep this virus under control.

[UK signs Trade Partnership Agreement with Ghana](#)

The UK has today signed a trade partnership agreement with Ghana that secures tariff-free trade and provides a platform for greater economic and cultural cooperation.

The deal supports a trading relationship worth £1.2bn and reinstates the terms of the economic partnership agreement between the two sides when the UK was part of the EU.

It means Ghanaian products including bananas, tinned tuna and cocoa will benefit from tariff-free access to the United Kingdom. UK exports are also in line to benefit from tariff liberalisation from 2023, including machinery, electronics and chemical products.

The agreement was signed by Secretary of State for International Trade Liz Truss and Ghana's Acting High Commissioner to the UK, Peprah Ampratwum, at the Department for International Trade in central London.

Secretary Truss was joined on a video call by Ghana's Minister Designate for Trade and Industry, Alan Kyerematen, to mark the signing.

International Trade Secretary Truss said: "I am delighted to be able to sign this deal with our friends and partners in Ghana. It provides certainty for businesses that provide vital jobs and livelihoods in Ghana, and it strengthens the ties between our two countries.

"We can now look forward to deepening and furthering our relationship in future, and working together to secure a broader agreement with the West Africa Region."

Minister for International Trade Ranil Jayawardena said: "This deal secures tariff-free access for products that British shoppers love – and supports jobs in Ghana – paving the way for further economic growth as we build back better from Covid-19.

"It is further evidence of the UK's determination to champion free trade around the world, which fosters growth, creates jobs and raises living standards for all."

UK Minister for Africa James Duddridge said: “The UK and Ghana have a strong partnership and the signing of today’s agreement marks an important moment for boosting trade, worth £1.2 billion, between our two nations.

“With tariff-free access for Ghana to the UK, it will enable businesses to scale up their operations, support innovation in markets and create jobs as we recover together from the coronavirus pandemic.”

Ghana’s largest exports to the UK include mineral fuels and oil, preparations of fish, fruit, cocoa and cocoa preparations. Its top imports include clothing/textiles, machinery and mechanical appliances, and chemical products from the UK.

The deal means the UK has now secured trade agreements with 65 non-EU countries, representing trade worth £217 billion in 2019.

This accounts for 97% of the value of trade with non-EU countries that we set out to secure agreements with at the start of the trade continuity programme.

Total UK trade with Ghana was £1.2 billion in 2019, of which UK exports were £652 million

The UK government has secured trade agreements with 65 countries plus the EU. Total trade with these countries was worth £890bn in 2019. This is equivalent to 63% of UK total trade

Sources: ONS UK Trade: All countries, non-seasonally adjusted, Q3 2020; HMRC UK Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics, December 2020

UK businesses embark on roadshow to discover new trading opportunities in Latin America and Caribbean

The Department for International Trade is hosting a virtual roadshow to help businesses across the UK identify new export and investment opportunities in the Latin America and Caribbean (LATAC) region. The LATAC Roadshow is being held between 1-4 March.

Her Majesty’s recently appointed Trade Commissioner for LATAC, Jonathan Knott, and DIT’s team of experts will join businesses from the region for virtual workshops, panels and one-to-one meetings throughout the day.

These events will provide businesses with insight into the latest exporting opportunities in vibrant markets such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru.

Sessions will cover a range of topics including clean growth and renewable energy, healthcare, agriculture and financial services. Businesses will also hear first-hand about the experiences of companies already successfully exporting to LATAC, including Weston's Cider and AB Europe.

Total trade between the UK and LATAC was £26.3 billion in the year to Q3 2020, with exports totalling £15.7 billion. Brazil was the largest trading partner accounting for over 20% of all trade. With the UK also seeking membership to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), these ties are expected to grow as it looks to deepen trading links with markets including Mexico, Chile and Peru.

Minister for Exports Graham Stuart will be joining a panel session on Clean Growth to discuss the UK's ambitions on tackling climate change and the opportunities for UK businesses to export more green goods and services to the region.

Minister for Exports Graham Stuart said:

I'm delighted to join this year's virtual trade mission to discuss the wealth of opportunity available to UK businesses to export more environmental goods and services to the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Tackling climate change is a top priority for the UK. As world leaders in areas including offshore wind, green finance, and sustainable construction, and as hosts of the upcoming COP26 summit, we are uniquely placed to work with partners across the region to help businesses build back better and greener from the impacts of the pandemic.

Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Latin America and the Caribbean Jonathan Knott said:

Our Latin America and Caribbean Business Roadshow will demonstrate the breadth of opportunities available to UK businesses, large and small, and encourage them to take full advantage of the business potential in this exciting and dynamic part of the world.

We are determined to do all we can to support our brilliant UK businesses and grow UK exports to the region, particularly as we look to recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. From life sciences to food and drink, there is a wealth of opportunity for businesses across the LATAC region, and I'd urge any business interested in beginning their exporting journey to get in touch with us. We can help you win contracts and grow.

One business attending the Roadshow is Weston's Cider, a 4th generation,

family run cider maker from Herefordshire, England. Established in 1880, the company presses its own local fruit and has one of the largest collection of cider vats in the UK.

Luke Padgett, Export Country Manager, Weston's Cider said:

Focussed on innovation, organic and traditional techniques we take pride in every drop. Our desire is to continue that vision and introduce our award winning, premium, category leading ciders across the emerging LATAC region, expanding on our growing Export portfolio.

Home to over 650 million people, LATAC covers 48 countries and territories with a growing middle-class population, meaning there is increased opportunity for British businesses to provide high-quality goods and services across the region. The UK has so far secured 5 trade continuity agreements with 24 countries in the region.

Bill introduced to create high risk, high reward research agency ARIA

- New Bill introduced to set up UK's Advanced Research and Invention Agency, an independent research body which will fund high-risk, high-reward scientific research
- legislation will provide ARIA with the powers to have an innovative and flexible approach to programme funding, as well as giving ARIA the ability to pursue ground-breaking discoveries
- the Bill equips ARIA with unique powers and freedoms to invest in ambitious research at unprecedented speeds

A new Bill to create the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA), an independent UK scientific research agency that will fund cutting-edge science and technology, was introduced to Parliament today (Tuesday 2 March 2021).

The Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill sets out the legislative framework and governance for the new agency, which was announced by the Business Secretary last month. The agency will empower some of the world's most exceptional scientists and researchers to identify and fund transformational areas of research to turn incredible ideas into new technologies, discoveries, products and services – helping to maintain the UK's position as a global science superpower.

The design of the agency allows this work to take place at greater speed, with flexibility and minimised bureaucracy.

The Bill equips ARIA with unique powers and freedoms that it needs to succeed, explicitly allowing the agency a much higher tolerance for failure than other UK funding agencies. This flexibility is necessary to enable the agency to develop technologies at speed that could create profound positive change for the UK and the rest of the world, recognising that failure is an essential part of scientific discovery.

As part of this, the Bill provides the agency with the powers to have an innovative and flexible approach to programme funding, including seed grants and prize incentives, as well as being able to start and stop projects according to their success. This innovative approach to funding will give its leadership the tools and autonomy to push boundaries in search of new discoveries.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

This Bill marks a momentous step forward for UK R&D – creating a bold, new scientific agency with invention at its core, putting the UK in a formidable position to respond to the most pressing global challenges of our time.

The success of our Vaccine Taskforce has shown the value of putting power in the hands of our best scientists to make swift, high-risk funding decisions – free from unnecessary bureaucracy. With this Bill, I am determined to ensure ARIA upholds this winning formula.

ARIA will be equipped with all the tools and freedoms it needs to succeed – placing our world leading scientists at the heart of decision making, stripping back red tape and giving our best minds license to invest in the most transformative research at speeds like never before.

ARIA will be based on models that have proved successful in other countries, in particular the influential US Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) model. This was instrumental in creating transformational technologies such as the internet and GPS, changing the way people live and work, while increasing productivity and growth. More recently, ARPA's successor, DARPA, was a vital pre-pandemic funder of mRNA vaccines and antibody therapies, leading to critical COVID therapies.

In the US, DARPA benefits from autonomy and flexibility outside the standard government contracting and granting standards. The ARIA Bill will provide the agency with exemption from the existing Public Contract Regulations, enabling ARIA to procure vital services and equipment with maximum flexibility so that it can carry out ground-breaking research at speeds rivalling a private investment firm.

The Bill will also purposefully streamline the agency's operating structure and minimise bureaucratic processes so it can focus all its efforts and resources on transformational research.

The government's intention, therefore, is for ARIA not to be subject to the Freedom of Information Act to reduce the administrative time required to process FOI requests and protect Britain's competitive advantage, while allowing the agency to run an extremely lean and agile operating mode – which is essential to its design and ultimate success.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

Today is another milestone moment for the UK's world class R&D community, as we introduce to Parliament the legislation needed to create ARIA.

By facilitating fast and flexible funding, removing bureaucracy and accepting failure as an essential part of scientific discovery, this new agency will empower our scientists and innovators to go where they haven't been before – accelerating the development of future products and technologies that could change all our lives for the better.

While the Bill will prioritise the formation of an agile research agency by stripping back red tape, it will also ensure this is balanced with necessary accountability and oversight.

Administrative exemptions will sit alongside legal obligations for ARIA to proactively share information about its activities. The agency will be subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office, as is usual for a public body, and will be required to submit an annual report of its functions and statement of accounts, which will be laid before Parliament for scrutiny.

The Business Secretary will also have robust powers to intervene in the interests of national security if required, for example, directing the agency to cease collaboration with certain hostile actors or closing specific programmes.

Recognising that pursuing ambitious, high risk research requires patience, the government's intention is to provide ARIA with the necessary long-term security: the Bill sets a 10-year grace period before any potential dissolution of the agency can be triggered.

The Bill's introduction to Parliament today follows the Business Secretary's [announcement of the new agency](#) on Friday 19 February 2021. The aim is for the agency to be fully operational by 2022.

A recruitment campaign will begin over the coming weeks to identify a world class interim Chief Executive and Chair to shape the vision, direction and research priorities for the agency.

ARIA will be backed by £800 million of government funding over the course of this Parliament, as set out by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak in the March 2020 Budget.

Ministerial appointments: 2 March 2021

Press release

The Queen has been pleased to approve the following ministerial appointments.



The Queen has been pleased to approve the following ministerial appointments following Royal Assent of the Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021.

- Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP to be designated as a Minister on Leave (Attorney General)
- Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP to be Attorney General
- Lucy Frazer QC MP to be Solicitor General

The Queen has also been pleased to approve that Lucy Frazer be sworn of Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council.

The Prime Minister gives the Attorney General his very best wishes for her maternity leave and looks forward to welcoming her back in the autumn.

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