

“Our fresh start means we can make all four corners of the United Kingdom stronger and more prosperous than ever before”

As the UK Internal Market Bill makes its way through Parliament, Welsh Secretary Simon Hart and Business Secretary Alok Sharma share their views about how Wales will benefit from powers returning from Brussels after Brexit and continued seamless trade with the rest of the UK in a recent article.

In just a few months' time, powers that are currently held by the European Union will be returned to the United Kingdom. Taking back control from Brussels presents an opportunity we have not seen in generations.

Decisions on important areas like air quality, energy efficiency of buildings and elements of employment law will now be made by the UK Government and the devolved administrations in Cardiff Bay, Holyrood and Stormont without removing any of their current powers.

It is a significant change and one which provides an immediate opportunity to work towards one of our key goals – to level up all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

This also means that unprecedented powers will flow to the devolved administrations, given MS's more power than ever before.

It means we can continue the recovery from Covid-19, working with devolved governments to invest money in business and communities across Wales and everywhere else it is needed across the UK.

Our fresh start means we can make all four corners of the United Kingdom stronger and more prosperous than ever before.

And it is why new laws are being introduced to Parliament today to make sure companies can trade unhindered across the UK, protecting jobs and livelihoods while maintaining our world-leading standards for workers, food and the environment.

Trade has been seamless across the UK for centuries and today's measures mean that we can continue to do business within our own borders without adding burdens for firms on the 31st December.

This is absolutely vital for Wales' economy. The country's biggest trading partner is the rest of the UK with around 75 per cent of its exports going to its friends and neighbours in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For hundreds of years this has been at the centre of our incredibly successful economic union, boosting business and creating jobs.

Whether it was building up the heavy industry that saw the valleys at the centre of the industrial revolution or whether it's the newly emerging industries such as FinTech that Welsh companies are at the forefront of – Wales has made the most of the opportunities provided by an ever-growing market within the United Kingdom.

Its prosperity has relied on businesses being able to sell their wares in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland without having to worry about differing regulations across food production, manufacturing and labelling.

Indeed, we are so used to our internal market and the advantages it brings we tend not to give it a second thought.

Without the action we are taking today to protect business, the common rules allowing the free flow of trade will fall away in December creating damagingly bureaucratic regulations across the UK. This would create barriers to trade and risk jobs.

It means that a farmer in Wales could potentially face problems when selling lamb in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland due to different rules around animal welfare standards, or Welsh Whisky producers could lose access to supply from barley farmers elsewhere in the UK.

It could even mean that in areas such as Saltney in Flintshire which crosses between Wales and England, businesses at one end of the town could face different rules and standards to that on the other end, putting one at unfair advantage.

The Bill we are publishing today will change that.

It will create exciting new opportunities to work with ministers in Wales, as well as other partners, to strengthen Wales and the whole of the United Kingdom. It removes none of the Senedd's existing powers so it's win, win for devolution.

The Bill will also give the UK Government powers to spend money across the whole country, including in areas where Brussels currently directs EU budgets.

As a result, we will be able to invest in infrastructure, economic development, culture, sport and international educational exchange schemes throughout Wales.

Alongside the Welsh Government's own responsibilities, these powers will increase the opportunity for much needed investment into communities from Aberdare to Aberconwy, and will speed up the process by which that investment can get there.

We asked for views from industry, academics and charities on the proposals and the many businesses who responded were clear that these proposals were

the best solution.

We will avoid new trade barriers, protect UK-wide benefits to consumers and give certainty to business as the Transition period ends.

By backing business and protecting the internal market of the United Kingdom, the Union will be stronger than ever before – trading with each other and across the world as we have done for centuries.

[Readout from Foreign Secretary meeting with Foreign Minister Kang of South Korea in Seoul](#)

News story

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab met Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha of South Korea today as part of a wider trip to the Indo-Pacific region.



The Foreign Secretary used his meeting with Foreign Minister Kang to discuss both countries' ambition to enhance and elevate the bilateral relationship between the UK and South Korea, building on our shared values and mutual interests, as part of the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt.

On Covid-19, they discussed the need for an international response to develop the vaccines and treatments that will help tackle the pandemic.

On trade, they discussed how we could build on the already extensive trade flows between the two countries and develop new opportunities beyond the continuity FTA agreed last year – with particular priorities for an enhanced FTA including covering tech and data.

They discussed climate change and the green recovery, in the context of the UK's presidency of COP26 and the G7 next year. They also discussed working

together to deliver more sustainable future development programmes.

Finally, they discussed areas of security cooperation, including in the areas of cyber, maritime security and regional stability, and the importance of upholding the international rule of law and human rights.

Both reflected on the 70th anniversary of the Korean War and the role played in the conflict by more than 80,000 British servicemen and women.

Published 29 September 2020

[Foreign Secretary statement on the death of the Amir of Kuwait](#)

News story

The Foreign Secretary has expressed his condolences to Kuwait following the death of HH Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

I am deeply saddened by the death of the Amir of Kuwait, HH Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, a great humanitarian leader and a true friend of the United Kingdom.

He served Kuwait for many years with dedication, and as a founding father of the GCC he contributed over many decades to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

On behalf of the UK, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to Kuwait and its people at this sad time.

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Protecting the nonproliferation regime

Thank you very much, Mr Chair.

I'm just going to start, if I might, by saying to you, Vassily, that I thought it was disappointing that Russia only confirmed today to members of this Council the identity of your briefers. I felt that treated the Council with disrespect and there was no need to do so unless, I suppose, perhaps you were hoping to secure other briefers.

But I want to say that we fundamentally disagree with the distorted narrative set out in the concept note and by today's briefers.

In the concept note, the organisers have sought to present as fact various unfounded and untrue propositions that Syria completely destroyed its chemical weapons programme in 2014; that Syria has not used chemical weapons since then; that any claims that they have are part of some kind of Western plot; and that the OPCW, the United Nations, and their reports are biased, lack integrity or are rife with malpractice.

By doing so, colleagues, the organisers want you to discount, doubt and disbelieve the evidence before your eyes. And they want you, in a small way, to become complicit in protecting the Assad regime from accountability for atrocities committed against the Syrian people.

But I think its worth reminding ourselves of the actual evidence, facts, that have been presented to us by the United Nations and the OPCW over the past seven years.

So, in seven years, the Syrian authorities have still failed to provide a complete and consistent declaration of their chemical weapons programme, as required by Security Council resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention, as required by international law.

The OPCW Director General has made clear that there remain serious, outstanding gaps and inconsistencies in Syria's chemical weapons declaration. The fate of more than 400 tonnes of chemical weapons agents and precursors and thousands of munitions are unclear.

Furthermore, since the initial declaration, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and now the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team, have

found the Syrian authorities responsible for using chemical weapons on no fewer than seven occasions, including in Khan Sheikhoun and Ltamenah in 2017.

The OPCW has presented evidence in thorough and methodical reports. The first IIT report sets out the details of an exhaustive and rigorous nine-month investigation. The report was clear on its methodology, the evidential standard applied, and the wide range of scenarios considered, and the reasons for accepting or discounting them. The IIT simply found that there was no evidence to support other explanations, such as those offered by Syria and Russia.

Now, colleagues, it's important to bear in mind that neither the Russian Federation nor their Syrian clients are unbiased actors without an agenda. Both have recently used chemical weapons – the Syrians extensively in their own country against their own people, and the Russian Federation in a failed assassination attempt in the United Kingdom, which tragically led to the murder of a British citizen. And Russia has grave questions to answer about the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny with a nerve agent last month.

It's against this backdrop they have attempted to undermine the OPCW and the international architecture designed to prevent the use of these abhorrent weapons.

We have been presented with so-called evidence of OPCW malpractice by individuals who were not fully party to investigations, could not accept that their views were not backed by the evidence, and who then breached the confidentiality obligations to the OPCW.

We have been presented with the results of investigations by so-called independent Russian NGOs, such as the Foundation for the Study of Democracy, with questionable or nonexistent expertise in the analysis of chemical weapons attacks. These presentations include various unconvincing theories about canisters, apertures, trays of glasses, and the strength of beds.

We have been subjected to lengthy conspiracy theories from journalists, whose Twitter feed reveals all the Council members need to know about the supposedly independent nature of their reporting, and from academics, whose theories have been dismissed by their better-qualified peers. We are told every month by Russia that the IIT findings cannot be trusted because the decision to create it was "controversial", despite it being created in full accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. We have been told it's untrustworthy because it's geographically imbalanced, despite its members coming from all geographic groups and in any case acting as independent professionals.

Various inconsistent positions have been put forward regarding individual incidents. For example, Syria and Russia have repeatedly changed their story about Khan Sheikhoun. First, they claimed there had been no release of toxic chemicals in Khan Sheikhoun. Then they claimed that inadvertently hit a terrorist chemical weapons dump, creating toxic chemicals which were not sarin. Then Syria finally handed over samples and admitted that sarin was released, but said it was someone else who did it. The IIT report highlights

the fact that the sarin used in attacks on Khan Sheikhoun in Ltamenah matched the declared Syria stockpile and analysis showed it was Syria's own sarin.

Indeed, on the fifth of July 2017, the Russian Ambassador to the OPCW, Alexander Shulgin, said, after reviewing the report on the incident in Khan Sheikhoun, only one thing is clear – either sarin or sarin-like substance was in fact used there. And yet at the Open Syria CW briefing on the 10th of September this year, Vassily Nebenzia said, “the use of sarin, in that case, was even more than questionable”.

The Russian playbook, colleagues, is to throw mud in all directions and see what sticks. They undermine independent expertise for their own self-interest. Don't let them do it.

Over the past seven years, the OPCW has worked tirelessly to assist Syria with resolving the outstanding issues in its declaration. Through its fact-finding missions, it has investigated incidents of chemical weapons use and has been tasked first by the Security Council as part of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, and subsequently by the Executive Council, to carry out the important task of identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons use.

While carrying out these vital tasks, the OPCW has found itself under sustained attack, including an attempted Russian GRU cyber-attack in 2018. Rather than use its privileged platform to persuade its Syrian clients to resolve the gaps and inconsistencies in their chemical weapons declaration and to stop using these weapons, Russia simply attempts, as today, to discredit the OPCW in its multinational staff.

Colleagues, the awful poisoning of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny by Novichok, a banned chemical weapon, reminds us of the importance of the OPCW and the importance of a nonproliferation regime. It is unconscionable that any government can even think of using chemical weapons against its own people or indeed against anyone else. The Syrian regime has repeatedly shown it is willing to do so.

Members of this Council have a particular responsibility to protect the nonproliferation regime and to ensure these abhorrent weapons are not used with impunity. We owe it to the victims and to potential future victims to realise this responsibility and to act on the basis of moral principles.

Thank you very much, Mr Chair.

[Virtual events continue to deliver for](#)

customers

Our [average handling times for August have now been published](#) and today we have published [updated guidance on site visits, hearings, inquiries and events](#), reflecting the latest advice issued by UK Government for England in response to the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). We are continuing to conduct site visits with precautions in place and are running our events virtually. We have increased the number of virtual events across all casework areas which includes Inquiries and Hearings for appeals, local plans and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project Examinations.

Virtual Events

Keeping casework moving is our priority. Holding Examinations, Hearings and Inquiries (which would previously have been held face-to-face) virtually has allowed us to continue with running these events whilst making it possible for all interested parties to participate.

We stopped carrying out physical events in March in response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, running our first virtual Hearing on 11 May.

Between June and August 2020, we had 71 cases that involved virtual events, and by the end of this month (September) we expect 64 further cases will have been delivered via virtual events. We anticipate to be scheduling even more cases for virtual delivery per month from October onwards.

Hearings for local plan examinations have now been held virtually, mostly hosted by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to whom we are most grateful. This includes the South Oxfordshire local plan examination where it is said over 4,600 people viewed the proceedings, streamed online. It is also hoped that the first trial of blended (part face-to-face and part virtual) local plan hearings and inquiries will take place in the next few weeks, once again hosted by the relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs).

We are ensuring virtual events are run in as fair and robust a way as possible and have been working with our stakeholders, including Planning and Environmental Bar Association (PEBA), National Infrastructure Planning Association (NIPA), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and The Law Society to identify and test the process. Our Inspectors have also been making use of the flexibilities brought in as part of the new Business and Planning Act. Restrictions are likely to continue for some time while the pandemic continues. Holding virtual events will continue as our standard practice in England for now, as it allows us to plan events both safely and reliably. Face-to-face Hearings and Inquiries will continue to be part of our future, and the forthcoming trials will inform how 'blended' virtual and face-to-face events develop, subject of course to the public health situation permitting them.

A new explanatory video guide to participating in Planning Inspectorate hosted virtual events is now available on our [virtual events guidance page](#).

Keeping appeal casework moving

Over the last few months we have been issuing between 1150-1400 decisions a month which we anticipate could rise in October. For comparison, pre-pandemic we were issuing typically 1500-1750 decisions a month. [See the latest Planning Inspectorate Statistics.](#)

Shortly after the lockdown in March, we removed the average appeal times on our 'appeals: how long they take' web page. As site visits and other events were postponed during March, April and part of May 2020, publishing average times would not have provided much meaningful information to our customers on how long a case can take to be decided.

However, as we've continued to progress our casework through the summer, we have now started publishing average times for delivering decisions again. These are the [average times from the previous month \(August\)](#) measured from the time we have received all the information we need from a customer to begin the appeal process ('valid') to the time a decision is issued. The appeal will 'start' later when an inspector is allocated, but all our performance information explains the total time we take, including the period before an inspector is allocated.

The average times are higher in comparison to previous months prior to the CV-19 pandemic, as we had postponed site visits and events, despite progressing as much casework via Written Representations as possible.

That said, we recognise that our customers need the answer to 'how long does an appeal take?' and that publishing average times, while offering an approximation, isn't ideal.

As a result, we're currently reviewing our approach to presenting statistics – including the use of average times for appeals – to ensure they are open, accurate and meet our customers' needs. When this is completed, we will produce official statistics which accurately reflect the Inspectorate's performance, including the length of time cases take to reach conclusion.

Responding to local restrictions

We continue to monitor and respond to the latest government advice on keeping safe and reducing the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Safety of our customers and staff is our highest priority. Today we have published a further update to our guidance for customers (dated 28 September) reflecting the latest advice from UK government.

Our casework covers the whole of England and Wales and as such we recognise that our customers may be subject to local restrictions to reduce the spread of the virus. In these situations, our Inspectors will adhere to local regulations and restrictions, rescheduling site visits if required.

For the latest information on casework arrangements in Wales please visit [GOV.WALES.](#)

Use our online service to submit an appeal

Customers wishing to submit an appeal should use our online service, the [Appeals Casework Portal](#), in the first instance.

All appeal and other documents should be submitted online or by email. This ensures that appeals are processed quickly. We have made provision for a limited number of staff to collect post sent to our offices. Documents sent to us by post must be scanned and then sent to the relevant casework team causing significant delay. We hope our customers understand the need to keep our staff safe and support us by using our online services.