

[PM call with King Salman of Saudi Arabia: 8 September 2020](#)

News story

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to King Salman of Saudi Arabia.



The Prime Minister spoke to King Salman of Saudi Arabia earlier today.

They discussed the importance of redoubling efforts to tackle coronavirus and working together to ensure a sustainable global recovery from the crisis.

The Prime Minister also noted the Kingdom's vital role in securing progress in the conflict in Yemen and the Middle East peace process.

He congratulated Saudi Arabia on its commendable leadership of the G20 during the coronavirus pandemic, and they looked forward to the planned G20 leaders' meeting in November.

Published 8 September 2020

[Smart-City firms announced for Export Academy to Asia-Pacific](#)

30 British tech companies have today been announced as the first participants in the Department for International Trade's (DIT) new Tech Export Academy programme that will begin this week.

The new Academy was launched in June 2020 at London Tech Week Connects by Secretary of State Liz Truss. It will see the first 2 cohorts of smart city tech firms participate in a 9 month programme that will provide a package of

support to help them expand and grow their business in the Asia Pacific region.

108 companies applied for the programme across smart cities capabilities, from smart mobility and infrastructure to smart buildings and cyber security. An independent panel selected the successful companies based on the strengths of their products and services, their focus on exporting to the Asia-Pacific region and their commitment to diversity and inclusion, a key priority for DIT and the tech sector more widely. The 30 successful companies are based across all 4 nations of the UK.

The panel consisted of DIT's Chief Scientific Adviser Dr Mike Short, Oriël Petry (Director of the Technology and Advanced Manufacturing Directorate), Colin Sinclair (CEO of the Knowledge Quarter in Liverpool) and Jane Morrison-Ross (CEO at tech trade body ScotlandIS).

The programme is being supported by the following companies: PWC, Linklaters, Deloitte, KPMG, BDO, Taylor Wessing, EY, HSBC, Santander Grant Thornton and Clifford Chance. These partner companies will host bespoke sessions with the cohorts on regulatory, tax, intellectual property and legal issues in the Asia Pacific region.

The programme will also include opportunities for the businesses to meet investors, undertake pitch training and learn about UK Export Finance support as well as participate in virtual trade missions to the Asia-Pacific region.

In light of the growing relationship between DIT and the Thai Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, which oversees smart cities development in the country, there will be an opportunity for the companies to attend a dedicated trade mission to Thailand next year. During the mission, the companies will showcase their expertise, products and services to the Thai market.

The names of the chosen tech firms were revealed in a speech by the Minister for Exports Graham Stuart MP at London Tech Week 2020.

Minister for Exports, Graham Stuart MP said:

Congratulations to the brilliant British smart cities businesses chosen to take part in this ambitious scheme. The programme will help the companies unlock their export potential and get a foothold in one of the fastest-growing regions in the world.

There is an increasing global demand for smart city technology, as we design urban environments that better suit the needs of 21st century life, from transport to energy to residential design. It is businesses like these joining the programme today that are working on and discovering the best solutions.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this scheme, and what opportunities these innovative businesses grasp over the next 9 months.

Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Asia Pacific, Natalie Black said:

Smart cities technology is a key area of interest across Asia Pacific. Governments and corporate businesses are keen to collaborate so I am delighted the Tech Export Academy has chosen to focus on this region first and look forward to supporting the first 30 selected companies in growing their business in this part of the world.

Adrian Fisher, Partner at Linklaters, said:

We're excited to partner with the Department for International Trade to support the growth ambitions of some of the UK's most promising tech companies. The evolving legal and regulatory landscape in the tech sector requires careful navigation – from data governance to financial regulation. Getting the legal and compliance issues right from the outset will go a long way in boosting the exporting successes of the companies taking part.

Sally Jones, EY's Trade Strategy and Brexit Leader, said:

EY is delighted to be supporting the Department for International Trade and its Tech Export Academy. The UK is a hotbed for tech innovation and helping these companies gain the skills and knowledge to access a global marketplace will be vitally important to the UK's future economic success. EY has worked with and supported many fast-growth, innovative companies through its Entrepreneur Of The Year programme and we're relishing the opportunity of helping many more through this new initiative.

Ben Powell, Public Sector Partner at Deloitte said:

With the number of trade deals set to increase following the UK's departure from the EU, we are proud to support the Department for International Trade in helping UK businesses take advantage of new opportunities.

The UK already has a strong and vibrant technology sector and Asia-Pacific is a key destination for growth. Businesses exporting technologies related to smart cities may need to understand new

legislation, customs rules, trade regulation and export controls to operate in the region.

We aim to bring the full range of Deloitte's experience – from tax and export compliance, to technology and digital products – to continue supporting some of the country's most innovative small and medium sized businesses thrive in these markets.

Programme applicants:

Cohort 1: Avalon

Cohort 2: Camelot

- Conigital Ltd
- Datactics
- Emu Analytics
- Intercede
- Ovon Technology
- See.Sense
- Sensat Surveying Limited
- Space Syntax
- Sycous Limited
- Telensa Systems Pty Ltd
- UrbanTide
- UtterBerry
- Vivacity Labs
- Vortex IoT Ltd
- Vucity Limited

[Water companies challenged to improve environmental performance](#)

The chief executives of fifteen water companies met today (8 September) with Environment Minister Rebecca Pow, who challenged them to do more to protect the environment and safeguard our water supplies.

Representatives from Ofwat, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Water UK, The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) were also present.

The meeting follows the [joint letter sent to water companies in July](#),

encouraging them to accelerate investment as part of the country's green economic recovery from coronavirus.

While water companies had coped well under increased pressure during lockdown, Minister Pow made clear that much stronger action was needed on environmental priorities, particularly in the following areas:

- Storm overflows: The volumes of sewage discharged into rivers and other waterways in extreme weather must be reduced. A new Taskforce has been set up between Defra, the EA, Ofwat and Water UK which will meet regularly and set out clear proposals to reduce the frequency and volumes of these incidents. The Environment Bill will also allow government to set legally binding wastewater targets.
- Chalk streams: Chalk streams – known for their clear waters and rich wildlife – continue to be at risk due to low flows, poor water quality and unsustainable abstraction by water companies. The Minister urged water companies to significantly raise their ambition to improve chalk stream catchments and asked them to join her at a Chalk Stream summit she will host on 16 October.
- Water resources and leakage: While improvements on leakage rates have been made, the Minister reiterated the government's expectation for leakage rates to be halved by 2050. A new [national framework](#) was published in March 2020 by the Environment Agency setting out the scale of action needed to safeguard our water supplies for the future, requiring collective action from government, water companies, businesses and the general public.

Today's meeting comes ahead of the Environment Agency's annual report on water companies' environmental performance, which will be published later this month.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

“Water companies need to take their environmental obligations seriously and this impetus must come from the top.

“Despite investment from the industry, the damage inflicted on our environment – our rivers, lakes, streams and the wildlife that rely on them – is still far too great. Today we discussed a number of issues I feel strongly about, including storm overflows, and how we can work together to see much more ambitious improvements.

“This country's green recovery from coronavirus can only happen if water companies step up and play their part.”

Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director of Environment and Business at the Environment Agency, said:

“Our water environment is precious and under huge and increasing pressure from a growing population and the climate emergency.

“Our environmental targets are ambitious and we are challenging water companies to go faster and further on environment, leakage and protecting supplies. Water companies have a key role to safeguard our water environment and we will regulate them as a modern regulator should; rewarding excellence and sanctioning behaviour that harms the environment. In this way we will be working with them to drive up standards including through our new Taskforce on storm overflows.

“Everybody shares a crucial responsibility to protect the environment for future generations, and we will continue to work with all parties to deliver much-needed improvements.

John Russell, Senior Director, Strategy and Planning at Ofwat, said:

“We welcome the challenge to water companies set by Minister Pow and are committed to continuing to work with government and other independent regulators on the future direction for the water industry, particularly the focus on environmental priorities. These sector wide discussions are crucial for setting targets which can drive long term resilience and broader improvements to water customers, such as the progress water companies are reporting on leakage and the industry’s pledge to achieve net zero by 2030.”

The meeting also touched on changes to the £5 billion Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) – investment by water companies in the environment – to make it more outcome-focused and increase the involvement and accountability of water companies.

New action to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Bolton

Mr Deputy Speaker, with permission, I’d like to make a statement on coronavirus.

As a country we have made huge strides in our fight against this invisible killer.

Today’s ONS figures show that the weekly coronavirus deaths have dropped to the lowest number since mid-March.

And the latest daily number of recorded deaths is 3.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have seen a concerning rise in the number of positive cases, particularly amongst younger people.

And these figures serve as a salutary reminder that this virus is still very much with us and remains a threat.

So it is critical that we maintain our collective commitment to controlling this disease.

And social distancing is the first line of defence.

While young people are less likely to die from this disease, be in no doubt that they are still at risk.

The long-term effects can be terrible, and of course they can infect others.

Six months on, many people are still suffering chronic fatigue, muscle pain and breathing difficulties.

Previously fit and healthy people reduced to barely being able to function.

A King's College survey, published today, shows that 300,000 people in the UK have reported symptoms lasting for more than a month and 60,000 people have been ill for more than 3 months.

And Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to address the point, which is of course good news, that the number of people sadly dying from coronavirus in this country is currently low.

We've seen all across the world how a rise in cases, initially among younger people, then spreads – leading to hospitalisations and fatalities.

In Spain, where the rise in cases started around 2 months ago, hospitalisations have risen 15 times since mid-July.

The number of daily deaths has reached 184.

In France, hospitalisations have more than tripled in the same period.

So this must be a moment of clarity for us all.

This is not over.

Just because we've come through one peak, it doesn't mean we can't see another coming towards our shores.

But together, we can tackle it.

So long as we remember that in a pandemic, our actions today have consequences tomorrow, for the people we love, for our communities, and for our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, each and every citizen has a responsibility to follow social distancing and help stop a second peak.

And after social distancing, the next line of defence is test and trace.

Test and trace

Over the past 6 months we've built the biggest testing system of any major European country, and one of the biggest testing systems in the world.

And today, I can tell the House that we have met our target to provide testing kits to all care homes for older people and people with dementia, that have registered to get tests.

But I will not rest.

We are working flat out to expand our testing capacity even further.

Using existing technology, we are expanding our capacity right now.

And we are investing in new testing technology too.

Last week, I was able to announce £500 million for next-generation tests, like saliva tests and rapid turnaround tests that can deliver results in just 20 minutes.

The ability to get rapid, on-the-spot results will significantly increase the weapons in our armoury, in our fight both against coronavirus, and for economic recovery.

We are rolling out these tests right now and plan to use them to relieve capacity constraints, to expand asymptomatic testing to find the virus, and to give people the confidence that a negative test result brings.

Local action

Next, Mr Deputy Speaker, where it's necessary we will not shy from taking targeted local action.

In June, I established the Joint Biosecurity Centre, to provide the best possible data analytics, using information from all possible sources.

Our local action is driven by the data.

We now publish daily local data on cases so that everyone can see the data on which these decisions are taken.

And this shows that our approach is working.

For instance, in both Leicester and Luton, the weekly case rate has more than halved during August.

I want to thank the people of Leicester, including the Honorable Gentleman opposite and of Luton, and the other areas where we've taken local action, who have followed social distancing and helped bring the virus under control.

Sometimes local action requires us to act fast and respond to changing circumstances.

And unfortunately, after improving for several weeks, we have seen a very significant rise in cases in Bolton.

Bolton is now up to 120 cases per 100,000, the highest case rate in the country.

I am publishing the data behind the decisions we have taken.

I must therefore tell the House that, working with the local council, we are taking further local action.

The rise in cases in Bolton is partly due to socialising by people in their 20s and 30s. We know this from contact tracing.

And through our contact-tracing system, we have identified a number of pubs at which the virus has spread significantly.

We are therefore taking the following action in Bolton, starting immediately.

We will restrict all hospitality to takeaway only and we will introduce a late night restriction of operating hours, which will mean all venues will be required to close from 10pm to 5am.

We introduce urgently further measures that put the current guidance – that people cannot socialise outside their household – into law.

I want us to learn the lesson from Spain and America and France – not have to learn the lesson all over again ourselves through more hospitalisations and more deaths – and take this action locally in Bolton. But, crucially, we all have a part to play.

Young people don't just spread the virus to each other. They spread the virus to their parents and their grandparents.

They spread it to those they come into contact with. And to others who they love.

I know social distancing can be hard and how it will be extra tough for students who will soon be starting university.

But please stick with it and play your part in getting this virus under control.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we are also putting in place extra measures, including visitor restrictions to restrict the spread of the virus into care homes and hospitals in Bolton and I want to thank the leadership of Bolton Council, who are doing an outstanding job in very difficult circumstances.

And I want to thank colleagues who represent Bolton in this House with whom I have discussed these measures.

And I want to say this directly to everyone living in Bolton: I know how anxious this can be.

And I know the impact that these measures will have.

We are asking you to take a step back, at a time when we all just want to get on with our lives and what we love, and back to normal.

But we need to take this crucial step to keep this virus at bay.

Because as we have seen elsewhere, if we act early, and control the virus, then we can save lives.

Technology and vaccines

Mr Deputy Speaker, as well as controlling the virus using the tools we have now, we will do everything in our power to bring to bear the technologies of the future.

Over the past few months we have seen the pivotal role that technology has played in our response.

Like next-generation rapid testing and machine-learning tools to help the NHS predict where vital resources might be needed, and the discovery here in the UK of the only 2 treatments known to save lives from coronavirus.

We want to keep this momentum going.

And so today, we are also allocating £50 million from our AI in Health and Care Award.

And this fund aims to speed up the testing and evaluation of some of the most promising AI technologies.

Because through bringing new technologies to the frontline, we can transform how we deliver critical care and services across the country.

Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, the best way out of this coronavirus pandemic remains a vaccine.

We have already announced that we will roll out the most comprehensive flu vaccination programme in history this winter.

We now have agreements with 6 separate vaccine developers for early access to 340 million doses of coronavirus vaccines.

And we will use every method at our disposal to get as many people protected as possible.

Conclusion

Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a virus that feeds on complacency.

And although time has passed since the peak we saw in the spring, the threat posed by the virus has not gone away.

Now, with winter on the horizon, we must all redouble our efforts so we can get this virus on the back foot, and I commend this statement to the House.

[Response to the ACMD report on novel benzodiazepines](#)

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