

Autumn Statement and Social Mobility

In more stable times, assessing the social mobility implications of policy is a difficult challenge. In an unpredictable period, this becomes much more complex. Every area of policy has some impact on another, and there is a danger of losing focus. To address this, the Social Mobility Commission is aiming to focus on the “big ticket” items where the evidence of impact is greatest. These are the policy areas which we hope governments, now and in the future, will acknowledge as their priorities in ensuring that this country nurtures and allocates talent in the best possible ways. They are described in our Work Plan and will shortly be set out in more detail in our Strategic Plan, which will provide the wider narrative about our approach and why we believe it is relevant to the current period.

Our main areas of focus will be on education, routes to work, and economy and enterprise. Assessing the Autumn Statement in the light of these three priorities presents a mixed picture. We share the ambition to grow the economy. Much of the debate about social mobility is focussed on relative mobility, which is the comparison between different groups, in terms of socio-economic background and access to higher level employment and income. This is an important part of the story, but far too little attention has been given to absolute mobility – which is when people move up, either in income or occupational status, compared to their parents. Arguably, this is the bigger challenge currently. Last week, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, produced a thought provoking report on intergenerational mobility, and the extent to which our younger generation, whatever their social background, are facing diminished opportunities compared to older people. Far too many people have seen their real incomes improve very little over the past decade. And there is a strong geographical aspect, which means that some parts of the country experience a disproportionate share of the problem.

The only solution to this is to grow the economy and to do so in ways which spread innovation and improved productivity across the whole of the country. We recognise that there is a strong commitment to this in the Autumn Statement, and a recognition that this requires fiscal and monetary stability, innovation and strong public services. In terms of the detail, it is too early to form judgements about how well this might work. However there are three aspects to which we would draw attention at this stage. First, is to commend the commitment to the most vulnerable. This does not, in itself, improve social mobility, as this depends on a range of other factors as well as income – but it does offer a degree of protection against opportunity diminishing for those families and their children who are most exposed to financial insecurity. We also commend the additional funding for schools, for much the same reason. It will not offset all of their pending challenges, but is likely to mitigate some of the most difficult pressures caused by rising costs. However there are two areas of substantial concern: the lack of any reference to the impact of financial pressures on early years or to further education.

It is highly unlikely that any government can meet its ambitions for a strong

economy without addressing skills. From a social mobility point of view, this is about how we create and open opportunity for high skilled and well paid employment, but is also about finding some new solutions to our biggest national problem: the number of young people and adults with low levels of formal qualifications. In large part this is about addressing deficiencies in basic skills, including literacy and numeracy – as this is a major impediment to the progress of individuals, and the capacity of the economy to innovate and improve productivity.

It is encouraging that the Autumn Statement does refer to skills and acknowledges the importance of current proposals to improve the skills system. However, it is silent on the risks posed by the current economic crisis to the organisations charged with delivering these outcomes. We know that early years development is critical to developing the cognitive and non-cognitive skills which enable children to do well, and we are supportive of the reforms to post-16 education and training which seek to strengthen technical and vocational pathways – because these aim to recognise and reward the wider range of talents which people have and which the labour market needs.

More funding is not always the answer to every problem, and is never the whole answer to every problem. How early years is delivered and how skills are taught are both extremely important areas of interest for us. Nothing can be delivered, however, without stable institutions – and there is evidence, in both early years and further education, that current funding levels are insufficient to recruit and retain high quality staff, or to secure the institutional stability needed to maintain current levels of service while things improve. We are concerned about the implications of this, both for the individuals who are affected (nearly 2 million people are enrolled at further education colleges) and the potential drag this may well have on the longer term ambition to deliver a stronger economy.

Katharine Birbalsingh OBE, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Alun Francis OBE, Deputy Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Foreign Secretary to call out Iran and Russia as threats to Middle East security

- The Foreign Secretary will today [Saturday 19 November] call out Iran and Russia as threats to the security of the Middle East in a speech to global leaders in Bahrain.
- He will commit to working with partners to ensure Iran can never develop a nuclear weapon and to tackle its destabilising activity in the region.

- The Foreign Secretary will also call out Putin's invasion of Ukraine as a 'flagrant breach' of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity which is 'heaping misery' on millions of Syrians and Yemenis by driving up food prices.

The Foreign Secretary will call out Iran and Russia as threats to the security of the Middle East in a speech at an international security conference today.

Speaking at the Manama Dialogue security conference in Bahrain, he will commit to working with partners in the region to ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon and highlight the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on food security across the region.

He will also highlight opportunities for cooperation on Gulf states' transition to green energy and look forward to greater trade between the Gulf and the UK following the conclusion of talks on a new Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Co-operation Council, expected next year.

On the threat posed by Iran, the Foreign Secretary is expected to say:

Iranian-supplied weapons threaten the entire region. Today Iran's nuclear programme is more advanced than ever before, and the regime has resorted to selling Russia the armed drones that are killing civilians in Ukraine.

As their people demonstrate against decades of oppression, Iran's rulers are spreading bloodshed and destruction as far away as Kyiv.

Britain is determined to work alongside our friends to counter the Iranian threat, interdict the smuggling of conventional arms, and prevent the regime from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

On Putin's war in Ukraine, the Foreign Secretary is expected to say:

Putin's onslaught against Ukraine amounts to a flagrant breach of those principles [sovereignty and territorial integrity]. No country is immune from the turmoil he has brought to world energy markets or the damage he has caused to global food security.

Putin's war is inflicting yet more suffering on Syrians and Yemenis, who were already enduring the privations of humanitarian emergency, and ordinary Lebanese, caught up in economic crisis.

The Foreign Secretary will hold bilateral meetings with a range of international counterparts at the Dialogue and take part in panel events on key issues facing the Middle East, including maritime security and conflict resolution.

Following the Manama Dialogue, the Foreign Secretary will be travelling to Qatar. He is planning to meet with UK police representatives who are in-country supporting British fans to enjoy a safe and enjoyable trip, to understand more about their plans for the tournament.

While there, he will also speak at an event on global food security, hold bilateral meetings with key partners and visit UK Armed Forces stationed in Qatar, alongside attending the opening ceremony of the World Cup and the first England game.

[Joint Statement from United States and the Great Lakes Special Envoys of Belgium, France and the UK](#)

Press release

The UK Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes, Alison Thorpe, joins the United States and the Special Envoys of Belgium and France to issue a statement about the security situation in eastern DRC.



English

The United States along with the Great Lakes Special Envoys of Belgium, France and the UK condemn in the strongest terms the continuing advance of the UN-sanctioned March 23 Movement (M23) illegal armed group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The resumption of violence since 20 October, including in and around the towns of Rutshuru, Kiwanja, Rumangabo and Kibumba, undermines peace efforts and has caused further insecurity and significant human suffering. We call on the M23 to immediately withdraw, end any acts violating international law, and to cease hostilities.

We reiterate our support for regional diplomatic efforts, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes, that promote de-escalation and create the

conditions for lasting peace in DRC. We encourage renewed dialogue through these mechanisms and for Congolese non-state armed groups to participate in the Nairobi process. All support to non-state armed actors must stop, including external support to M23. We call on countries in the region to use all means available to them to urge an immediate cessation of hostilities and immediate resumption of consultations on concrete steps to deescalate current tensions.

We reaffirm our commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries in the Great Lakes region.

Français

Les Etats-Unis et les envoyés spéciaux de la Belgique, de la France et du Royaume-Uni pour la région des Grands Lacs condamnent dans les termes les plus vifs l'avancée continue en République démocratique du Congo (RDC) du groupe armé illégal et sanctionné par les Nations Unies intitulé Mouvement du 23 mars (M23). La reprise des violences depuis le 20 octobre, notamment dans les villes de Rutshuru, Kiwanja, Rumangabo et Kibumba et leurs alentours, sape les efforts de paix et a entraîné un accroissement de l'insécurité ainsi que de grandes souffrances humaines. Nous appelons le M23 à se retirer immédiatement, à mettre fin à toute activité violant le droit international et à cesser les hostilités.

Nous réaffirmons notre soutien en faveur des efforts diplomatiques régionaux, notamment des processus de Nairobi et de Luanda, qui promeuvent la désescalade et créent les conditions d'une paix durable en RDC. Nous encourageons la reprise du dialogue à travers ces mécanismes et incitons les groupes armés non étatiques congolais à participer au processus de Nairobi. Tout soutien à des acteurs armés non étatiques doit cesser, y compris le soutien extérieur au M23. Nous appelons les pays de la région à faire tout ce qui est en leur pouvoir pour demander une cessation immédiate des hostilités et une reprise immédiate des consultations sur des étapes concrètes permettant de faire baisser les tensions actuelles.

Nous réaffirmons notre attachement à la souveraineté et à l'intégrité territoriale des pays de la région des Grands Lacs.

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[Statement by the AUKUS Partners to the](#)

IAEA Board of Governors

Chair,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States on our effort through the AUKUS partnership to determine the optimal pathway for Australia to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

Chair,

We are now more than one year into our 18-month initial consultation period, and we are pleased with the progress made so far.

Since the September Board meeting, senior officials and technical experts have held further trilateral discussions in our capitals. We have also continued to hold productive technical consultations with the IAEA's AUKUS taskforce and the IAEA

Secretariat in Vienna as we work to formulate a safeguards approach that will meet the IAEA's technical objectives. These consultations are regular and ongoing, and they reflect the depth of the AUKUS partners' commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

We remain resolutely committed to setting the highest possible non-proliferation standards in relation to our co-operation on the AUKUS endeavour, and we will continue to keep Member States fully updated on our trilateral consultations with the IAEA.

Chair,

Sadly, there have been continued calls by some countries for the Agency to suspend engagement with us until a separate mechanism is established to discuss all aspects of AUKUS cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines.

All Member States have the right to confidential discussions with the IAEA Secretariat, and it is vital that the Agency remains the impartial and independent technical authority on the implementation of safeguards agreements. At the September Board, the Director General reiterated his satisfaction with AUKUS partners' level of engagement to date, and reaffirmed the mandate of the IAEA to engage with Member States on safeguards matters. To reconfirm what we have set out at the Board on previous occasions, Australia's proposed naval nuclear propulsion activities will occur within the framework of Australia's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) and Additional Protocol, providing the firm legal basis on which the IAEA, through the Director General and the Secretariat, is engaging with Australia and AUKUS partners.

Chair,

We would like to briefly address the unfounded criticism that certain members

continue to repeat at this Board. As an example, one distinguished delegate yesterday identified nine items on which they claim the Director General is required to – and has purportedly failed to – report with respect to AUKUS. In his September report, the Director General explicitly stated that Australia has “complied with its reporting obligations under its CSA and AP, including those required under Modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements to its CSA.”

The Director General also confirmed that further reporting by Australia at this time would be premature because Australia has “informed the Agency that...no activities listed in Annex I of the AP had either been conducted or were planned; no transfers of equipment/material listed in Annex II of the AP had either taken place or were planned; and no decision had been taken to construct or otherwise acquire any nuclear reactor or other nuclear facility in connection with AUKUS.”

Given we have repeatedly responded to these unfounded allegations in previous meetings, we will not again refute them line by line. However, we would like to make one point clear: Australia and the AUKUS partners are fully compliant with their respective safeguards obligations. Any assertions to the contrary are without any factual or legal foundation.

Chair,

We will continue our engagement with the Agency over the coming months, and we anticipate there will be further reports from the Director General in the future upon which we look forward to further discussions. We will continue to update the Board in future, as appropriate.

Thank you, Chair.

Royal Air Force completes world-first sustainable fuel military transporter flight

- First time an aircraft has flown in the UK using 100% sustainable aviation fuel on all engines
- Potential to reduce lifecycle carbon emissions by up to 80% while improving operational effectiveness
- Another key step by the RAF towards achieving Net Zero by 2040

An RAF Voyager – the military variant of an Airbus A330 – took to the skies over Oxfordshire powered entirely by 100% sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), paving the way for a range of possibilities for the future of flying military and civilian aircraft.

The flight, which took place on Wednesday, was a joint endeavour between the RAF, DE&S and industry partners Airbus, AirTanker and Rolls-Royce, with the fuel supplied by Air bp.

Sustainable aviation fuel – which is made from waste-based sustainable feedstocks, such as used cooking oil – reduces lifecycle carbon emissions on average by up to 80% compared to the conventional jet fuel it replaces, lessens the RAF's reliance on global supply chains, and improves operational resilience.

Defence Minister Baroness Goldie said:

The Royal Air Force has flown the UK's first military air transport flight using 100% sustainable aviation fuel on one of their operational Voyager aircraft. They should be rightly proud of this achievement; it is a breakthrough moment for the RAF and an exciting development for the MOD.

Through the RAF's pioneering spirit, expertise and partnership with UK industry, British science and engineering is leading the way in improving operational resilience and developing future operating capability in a climate-changed world.

Different approaches will suit different platforms and environments. As such, a range of alternative fuel options are being looked at to ensure the UK is at the forefront of this developing technology.

This success follows last November's small aircraft UK flight powered by 15 litres of synthetic gasoline – another world-first led by the RAF. Synthetic fuel is made from water and carbon dioxide, which is then put under pressure and an electric current run through it.

Wednesday's 90-minute flight from RAF Brize Norton, flown by a combined RAF, Rolls-Royce and Airbus flight test crew, replicated an air-to-air refuelling sortie and was witnessed by senior RAF and industry representatives. It demonstrated the RAF's potential for its future operational capability, ensuring the ability to contribute to UK defence wherever and whenever required.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston said:

Climate change is a transnational challenge that threatens our resilience, our security and our collective prosperity. That is why I have set the RAF the ambitious challenge of becoming the world's first net-zero Air Force by 2040. The way we power our aircraft will be key to meeting that challenge and the RAF is already thinking about how we will operate beyond fossil fuels.

This exciting trial flight of a Voyager from RAF Brize Norton powered entirely by Sustainable Aviation Fuel is an important

milestone on that journey, and marks another technological first for the RAF alongside our industry partners.

Engineers from Airbus' Commercial Aircraft and Defence and Space divisions have been working with the RAF, Rolls-Royce and Airtanker testing the aircraft's performance and handling on the ground and in the air in preparation for the final flight with both engines powered by 100% SAF.

Aviation Minister at the Department for Transport, Baroness Vere said:

Our Jet Zero Strategy made clear that sustainable aviation fuels are key to greener flight for both military and civilian aviation.

This is a win for the planet and a testament to British ingenuity. We have launched the £165 million Advanced Fuels Fund to kickstart a homegrown SAF industry, as well as challenging the sector to deliver the first net zero transatlantic flight next year.

This breakthrough test flight is just one of the ways the RAF is actively working to reduce lifecycle carbon emissions produced by flying its aircraft. Other innovations have included a world-first, record breaking microlight flight using synthetic fuel, flying an electric aircraft at RAF Cranwell and creating fuel from genetically modified bacteria.

While continuing to fulfil the priority focus of protecting the nation, the sustainable aviation fuel could mark a step-change towards the RAF's goal to be Net Zero by 2040. Working towards the Government's Net Zero 2050 goal and Jet Zero Strategy, the RAF also plans for their first Net Zero airbase by 2025.

In addition to supporting the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel in the Armed Forces, the Royal Air Force Commander in Chief HM King Charles III has also supported an increase in its adoption in the private sector through the [Sustainable Markets Initiative](#). The SMI is a network of global CEOs from across all industries, working together to accelerate a sustainable future in line with its mandate. Part of the SMI's work is raising awareness of SAF amongst the business community and encourage greater SAF uptake in corporate travel in addition to increased purchase agreements to encourage demand from the public and private sectors.