

Scottish Secretary outlines future of EU relationship

Speaking at the Committee he said:

“On 31 January, we delivered on the promise made to the British people nearly four years ago by finally leaving the EU.

“We have now left the EU as one United Kingdom and are free to determine our own future and form relationships with old allies and new friends around the world.

“The UK Government will negotiate these relationships on behalf of the United Kingdom, but we are clear that the devolved administrations should be closely involved in the process, both at Ministerial level for example via the Joint Ministerial Committee on European Negotiations, and via ongoing and constructive engagement between officials.

“As the Government has been clear, we want a relationship with the EU which is based on friendly cooperation between sovereign equals, and centred on free trade.

“We are not asking for a special, bespoke, or unique deal.

“We want a comprehensive free trade agreement similar to Canada’s, and in the very unlikely event the we do not succeed, our trade will be based on our existing Withdrawal Agreement deal with the EU.

On immigration he said:

“Our new points based immigration system will ensure the Scottish economy continues to gain access to the labour it requires, and will treat everybody based on their skills and contribution, not where they come from.

“This means it will get a lot easier for Scottish companies to recruit the labour they need from outside the EU/EEA, and a bit harder to recruit from within the EU/EEA.

“Douglas Ross and I have been talking to key Scottish stakeholders to understand and help those that might have genuine difficulties.

“The new system provides an opportunity for employers in Scotland to make the case for the inclusion of a range of roles, which up to now have been out of the scope of the visa regime.”

Updated statement on coronavirus

We recognise that students, parents, schools and colleges will be concerned about the possible impact of coronavirus on the 2020 summer exam series. Our advice at this time is to continue to prepare for exams and other assessments as normal.

We continue to work closely with exam boards, other regulators and the Department for Education and we have met to plan for a range of scenarios, as the public would expect. Our overriding priorities are fairness to students this summer and keeping disruption to a minimum.

It is still many weeks until exams start and we will issue updated advice if necessary, giving schools and colleges as much notice as possible.

Lt Gen Richard Nugee to lead MOD's climate change policy

Lt Gen Richard Nugee has been appointed to lead the review, which will explore how the department can better incorporate climate change and sustainability considerations into Defence's processes and policy decisions.

Defence faces fresh and evolving challenges to how and where it operates as a result of climate change. Our Armed Forces, for example, need to be prepared to operate more often in the Arctic region as ice sheets recede and Russian submarine activity increases; our forces are increasingly called upon to assist with natural disasters across the globe; and they need to be able to operate in environments that will and are experiencing more extreme weather patterns.

In addition, defence is one of the largest central government contributors to greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the operation of its aircraft, ships and vehicles plus its large estate of bases and housing.

The former Chief of Defence People will drive climate change policy and planning within the MOD and develop the department's strategy to reduce its contribution to carbon and greenhouse gas emissions.

The review will focus on the Ministry of Defence's contribution to NZ50 – the Government's commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Lieutenant General Richard Nugee said:

The effect of climate change will challenge how our Armed Forces

operate today and will need to operate in the future; we need to act now to understand and prepare for the changes that have to be made. At the same time, we must reduce our own emissions to help the nation reach its Net Zero 50 commitment.

I will be looking at all elements of defence, from equipment to infrastructure, our processes, functions and behaviours to ensure that we develop a response that is built on much of the good work that we are already doing.

Much of the success of our response will rest on our ability to motivate and harness the passion and enthusiasm of our people and the capabilities of our allies and industrial partners.

The review will focus on a range of initiatives including the MOD's NZ50 strategy and setting a baseline for defence's emissions and carbon footprint.

[Lord Pickles recommended to chair the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments](#)

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Michael Gove, has today (Friday 06 March) announced that Lord (Eric) Pickles is the government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA).

Lord Pickles has forty years of experience working in public life. He was formerly the Conservative MP for Brentwood and Ongar and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, before being made a peer in 2018.

Whilst Secretary of State, he oversaw the establishment of a new ethical regime in local government, including taking steps to stop commercial lobbying by councillors of their own council. His department also ended the then common practice of government bodies hiring lobbyists to lobby government, and became the first Whitehall department to advertise all its jobs online to open up recruitment.

He is currently the government's special envoy for post-Holocaust issues and co-Chair of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation.

Lord Pickles will now attend a pre-appointment hearing with the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC).

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Minister for the Cabinet Office,

Michael Gove, said:

With over forty years dedicated to public service, Lord Pickles will be a superb chair of ACOBA. He has the insight and integrity to make the business appointments process work fairly, sensibly and transparently.

I would also like to thank Baroness Browning, who has held the post of ACOBA Chair since 2014 and will step down at the end of March.

Lord Pickles said:

I look forward to discussing with the Select Committee how I hope to tackle concerns about “revolving doors” and lobbying, whilst balancing the benefits of attracting talent from the voluntary sector and private sector into the Civil Service.

The chair is appointed for a five year non-renewable term and leads the committee which independently advises the government, former ministers, senior civil servants and other Crown servants on the rules around taking employment after leaving their roles.

The recommendation follows a fair and open recruitment exercise carried out in line with the principles of the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies, published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

PM announces new funding in fight against spread of coronavirus

The global race to find a vaccine for coronavirus will be bolstered by support announced by the Prime Minister today, funded by the UK's international development budget.

- New £46 million package includes funding for urgent work to find a coronavirus vaccine and develop a rapid test for the disease
- PM has visited a lab in Bedfordshire where British scientists are using expertise and experience from previous epidemics to create a quicker and cheaper way to diagnose coronavirus
- British experts, funded by Government, are on the front line of the global fight against coronavirus, working to prevent the spread of the disease into and around the UK

- Efforts form part of the Government's four-phased approach to contain, delay, mitigate and research coronavirus.

The global race to find a vaccine for coronavirus will be bolstered by support announced by the Prime Minister today, funded by the UK's international development budget.

Supported by UK funding, eight possible coronavirus vaccines are currently under development and efforts are being made to get any viable vaccines from sequencing of the virus to clinical testing in under a year – a record timeframe. Governments around the world could then work with pharmaceutical companies to get vaccines into production and use. Today's additional support will bring the UK's investment into COVID-19 vaccine research to £65 million.

UK experts are leading the scientific and medical response to the global coronavirus outbreak and the UK was one of the first countries to establish a laboratory test for the virus. However, no country has yet found a method of diagnosing coronavirus without sending samples to a lab for testing – a process that can take several days.

Today the Prime Minister visited Mologic lab in Bedfordshire which is using UK aid funding to develop rapid diagnostic test devices for coronavirus to allow medical professionals or potentially even individuals at home to identify the disease quickly without relying on specialist facilities. This will mean patients can be treated more quickly, reducing the risk of them passing the virus onto others and helping them to recover quickly. The lab is building on extensive experience creating similar tests for other infections.

Efforts to develop a diagnostic test form part of the Government's work to limit the spread of the virus, investing in and informed by scientific research.

A rapid diagnostic test can also be used by countries around the world that are not currently able to diagnose the virus at all. Low-income countries without the medical infrastructure to conduct laboratory tests or who do not have access to the necessary reagents are not able to differentiate coronavirus from other common causes of fever such as other bacterial, viral and parasitic infections.

The majority of cases in those countries are therefore going unchecked, increasing the risk of the virus spreading both locally and around the world. To ensure access to the technology, the test will therefore be jointly manufactured in the UK and Senegal – the first time a diagnostic has been produced in the continent, supported by UK aid funding.

Today's announcement builds on the plan set out by the Prime Minister earlier this week to tackle coronavirus in the UK. The Government is doing everything possible, based on the advice of world-leading scientific experts, to prepare for all eventualities. This plan has four strands – containing the virus, delaying its spread, researching its origins and cure, and mitigating the impact should the virus become more widespread.

Today's funding package, which includes support for the World Health Organization's Flash Appeal, will also help vulnerable countries prepare for the spread of the disease in other ways.

UK-funded infectious disease experts are working in developing countries which have large urban populations and transport links to the UK and to China and other countries experiencing large outbreaks. Experts will support countries to prepare for and respond to suspected cases, for example by creating effective isolation zones.

International efforts are being coordinated by a new UK Government Coronavirus International Taskforce, bringing together expertise from the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Coronavirus is the biggest threat in countries whose healthcare systems are unable to cope with large outbreaks. Ensuring those countries have mechanisms in place will prevent a surge of cases which would also present risks to us at home.

Today's announcement brings the UK's total support to fight the virus internationally to £91 million.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Keeping the British people safe is my number one priority, and that's why I've set out our four-part plan to contain, delay, mitigate and research coronavirus.

We are ensuring the country is prepared for the current outbreak, guided by the science at every stage. But we also need to invest now in researching the vaccines that could help prevent future outbreaks.

I'm very proud that UK experts – backed by government funding – are on the front line of global efforts to do just that.

International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

The UK is well-prepared to respond to potential cases of coronavirus at home, but a global response is needed to effectively combat the disease.

We are investing UK aid and using the best of British expertise and science to find new ways to vaccinate against, treat and diagnose the virus, and to support global efforts to prevent further outbreaks around the world.

Every action that we take to prevent the virus spreading makes the UK safer.

Government Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance said:

Rapid testing is going to be key to managing this outbreak, but ultimately vaccines are going to provide the long-term protection we need.

The UK has some of the world's leading scientists and this money will help in our fight to tackle this new disease.

Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said:

The United Kingdom's support for the global response to the new coronavirus outbreak will protect the health of people in many parts of the world, from assisting countries with fragile health systems to fuelling the fight to find a vaccine.

At this critical time in the battle against COVID-19, the WHO is grateful for the UK's solidarity and commitment to keeping people safe at home and around the world.

It comes ahead of the UK hosting the "Global Vaccine Summit 2020" in June, demonstrating the UK's leadership in global health security.

Notes to Editors

The package of £46 million announced today is made up of:

- Up to £20 million for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to support vaccine development. This is in addition to the £30 million commitment that the UK has already made to CEPI, bringing the UK's total commitment to £50 million.
- Up to £5 million through the Joint Initiative on Research for Epidemic Preparedness in collaboration with Wellcome to develop quicker diagnosis methods and perform other essential research for disease control. This is in addition to the £20 million rapid response research call for novel coronavirus research launched on 4 February 2020.
- Up to £16 million for humanitarian partners to help the most vulnerable countries prepare for coronavirus. This includes £5 million to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; £5 million to UNICEF to support infection prevention and access to safe water; and £6 million for extra support for other partners, including for medics and supplies.
- £5m for the WHO's flash appeal. This is in addition to the £5 million commitment that the UK has already made to the appeal.

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