

FCO press release: Change of British High Commissioner to Tonga – February 2020

2016 to 2019 Ashgabat, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2012 to 2015 FCO, Deputy/Acting Head, Projects Task Force 2010 to 2012 Ulaanbaatar, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2010 Ministry of Defence, International Liaison 2009 to 2010 FCO, Finance Directorate 2008 to 2009 Ulaanbaatar, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2008 UKTI, Acting Head, Strategy and Innovation Section 2007 to 2008 FCO, Migration Directorate 2006 to 2007 FCO, Afghanistan Group 2006 Kabul, Acting Head, Political /Military Section 2006 FCO, Conflict Issues Group 2003 to 2006 Yerevan, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2001 to 2002 Dushanbe, Chargé d'Affaires 1999 to 2001 FCO, Head, Visa Policy Section, Joint Entry Clearance Unit 1998 to 1999 Belgrade, First Secretary – Political 1995 to 1998 Kiev, First Secretary – Head of Commercial Section 1991 to 1995 FCO, First Secretary – European Union (Internal) Department 1988 to 1991 Bonn, Second Secretary – Political 1986 to 1988 FCO, Second Secretary – Environment, Maritime, Aviation and Environment Department 1984 to 1986 Brussels, Third Secretary Political, UK Permanent Representation to the European Union 1981 to 1984 Paris, British Vice Consul & Entry Clearance Officer 1979 to 1980 Latin America Floater, Temporary duty in posts in Latin America & the Far & Middle East 1974 to 1979 FCO, Third Secretary 1974 Joined FCO

A Passenger focused railway

Wherever you live, you deserve a railway that widens your children's horizon, gives you access to highly skilled, highly paid jobs, and provides a viable green alternative to getting in your car.

For too long, millions of rail passengers in the north of England have not had that. They have had to start and end their working day facing cancellations and delays. Some stations, particularly on Sundays, have been left without trains for hours on end.

It's no surprise that passengers have lost trust in the north's rail network. The service provided by the rail network in the north has failed to meet the needs of passengers. People across the north deserve better, their communities deserve better and I am determined to achieve that.

In January I [announced that the Northern franchise was no longer financially sustainable](#) and would only be able to continue for a small number of months. I am announcing today (29 January 2020) that from 1 March 2020 the Northern Rail franchise will be taken into public ownership and the government will

begin operating services through the public-sector operator – the so-called operator of last resort.

The [public-sector operator](#) is a company entirely owned by my Department and run by experienced railway managers. It already owns and oversees another franchise, East Coast, which it brands as London North Eastern Railway. Passenger satisfaction has risen in the nineteen months it has been operating the service.

This is a new beginning for Northern, but it is only a beginning. Northern's network is huge and complex, some of the things which are wrong are not going to be quick or easy to put right. Nonetheless, I am determined that Northern passengers see real and tangible improvements across the network as soon as possible.

The roll out of new trains that's already begun under Northern will continue and Pacers will be banished very soon on the western side of the Pennines. In Yorkshire, Pacers will be gone by the spring and next year, we will move electric trains from elsewhere on the network to the north, boosting capacity for commuters into Manchester and Leeds.

We know overcrowding is a problem. To ensure we are deploying the trains in the right place to meet demand, we will be trialling new technology to identify crowding pinch points. We will also be extending platforms at 30 stations on the Northern network to allow for longer trains.

We will also be making sure that every journey is made on a train fit for passengers: all Northern's trains will be deep-cleaned and we will review the cleaning pattern to make sure the first and last passengers travel on trains in the same condition.

Over many months we have seen completely unacceptable numbers of cancellations on Sundays, affecting town centres, businesses, families and community groups. We understand this and I have therefore asked the public-sector operator to prioritise building on the recent agreement with ASLEF to improve the reliability of Sunday services and significantly reduce the number of cancellations.

Beyond this, I have asked Robin Gisby and Richard George, who lead the public-sector operator, to prepare a plan in their first 100 days, to make sure we leave no stone unturned in improving this franchise for passengers.

Improvements can't be delivered in isolation, so the public-sector operator will work hand in hand with Network Rail to make sure the railway delivers as one, with a single-minded focus on the interests of the passenger. As part of this a newly-created cross-industry North West Recovery Task Force, co-ordinated by Network Rail, will deliver recommendations on how best to boost capacity and performance in the short, medium and longer term.

Many of Northern's problems are due to inadequate infrastructure. That, too, must change – though inevitably it will take longer than some other improvements. I have instructed the leadership of the public-sector operator

to sit down with Network Rail and build a comprehensive new masterplan to review congestion around Manchester. Continuing to assess the Castlefield Corridor, as well as key junctions and interactions across the wider network to develop a series of interventions which will actually deliver the improvements required. This will complement the work already ongoing to develop an ambitious package of enhancement works at Leeds Station.

The vast majority of Northern's trains pass through Leeds or Manchester, often picking up delay as they do. Improving the railway in these cities will have knock-on effects for passengers across the north of England.

The action we're taking today is in no way a reflection on Northern's dedicated and hard-working staff. Staff have had an incredibly tough job to do in challenging circumstances. I want to reassure them that their jobs are safe and they will be transferred to the public-sector operator on their existing terms and conditions. I recognise that many of the staff facilities are not up to scratch and have asked the public-sector operator to look closely at making improvements.

I would also like to be clear that the only differences passengers should notice is services gradually starting to get better. All tickets, including season tickets, will still be still valid.

Today's announcement will inevitably raise questions about the future of rail privatisation. Over the past twenty years privatisation has reversed over 2 decades of declining passenger numbers and passenger journeys have almost doubled to nearly 2 billion.

However, it is clear that the current model is now struggling to deliver. Across the country a number of franchises are failing to provide the reliable services that passengers require. We know change is needed, and it is coming. The [Williams Review](#) is looking at reforms across the railway to ensure customers are at the heart of the system.

The railways were invented in the north of England and last year the Prime Minister promised that we would give the railway back to the places it was born. With local leaders having more power over local services, timetables, fares and stations. Today marks the first small step in that journey. The first step towards the north taking back control of its railways and its people taking back control of their travelling lives, and its economy being strengthened rather than weakened by its transport network.

There will be no more leaving behind, this government is committed to levelling up.

Fixing the project delivery system

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

I want to start by highlighting the Institute for Government's recently published annual Whitehall Monitor report which sets out our commentary on our [Annual Report](#) data.

It is absolutely right when it comments that the Government needs to do more to prioritise and balance the infrastructure pipeline.

This government has an ambition to deliver 'an infrastructure revolution'. This includes levelling up economic and social infrastructure, with an additional £100 billion investment commitment to ensure that all citizens across the UK will benefit.

What is already clear, is that the government is committed to driving better infrastructure performance and whole life value from taxpayer-funded investments.

Government has taken sustained action to build project and programme capability over the past decade.

We have experience in delivering successful programmes over the years, like 30 Hours Free Childcare or the continuing good work that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is doing with Sellafield to safely decommission the site.

However, we can do better.

We have many great projects in train, projects which will make a real difference to the UK's infrastructure and the lives of people across the country.

But too often we let the people of this country down, because our projects are late, cost more than planned, or fall short on their promised benefits.

We need to take action collectively across government, and indeed across across the wider public sector and private sector too.

We need to fix the project delivery system.

To do this we need to focus on the three 'P's: people, principles and performance, to improve the effectiveness of delivery and provide better outcomes for citizens:

- Making sure our people have the tools, competence and skills they need to deliver.
- Being clear about the principles of delivery and getting the basics of delivery right.
- Driving a step change in performance so we can meet future challenges.

People

As the Cabinet Office Talent Champion and Gender Equality Champion for the Project Delivery Profession, I know that nurturing our people is of primary importance.

We need to equip people with the tools and capability they need to deliver this infrastructure revolution.

We know that having leaders with the right skills and experience is a key factor in project outcomes. We also know that the more complex the project, the more important that becomes.

Project Delivery is a growing profession, and interest in it has surged in recent years. Through programmes like the [Major Projects Leadership Academy \(MPLA\)](#) and [Project Leadership Programme \(PLP\)](#), we have trained over 2000 professionals since 2012, and we have a flourishing pipeline of early talent through our popular Project Delivery Fast Stream scheme.

But the drive to professionalise project delivery in government is still recent.

And while project delivery skills are improving, there remains a significant shortfall in both capacity and capability, against the government's ambitions. So we need to accelerate.

Building project delivery capacity and capability will therefore be a major preoccupation for the IPA over the coming year and beyond.

As part of this, we plan to put in place a new, more rigorous approach to accreditation for government project delivery professionals, linked to external professional standards.

We want this to look at, not just knowledge and skills but also hands on experience, and for senior leaders, track their record of successful delivery.

And we will link this to a structured framework for development, from foundation skills through to mastery, including our highly successful leadership programmes.

We also need to be certain that the market is addressing skills and capability gaps too, driving innovation and productivity improvements and being disciplined when they bid for projects.

We need to invest in skills to help our people embrace technology. We need to work across government and with industry to ensure that further education and apprenticeships are considered as attractive as going to university.

We need to use technology to open the next generation's eyes to the variety of interesting and fascinating jobs that exist in the project delivery profession in government.

We also need to ensure that the project delivery profession is representative of the society we serve; this will enable us to deliver projects reflecting the needs of our diverse society.

We have focused on attracting, developing and retaining project delivery professionals from all backgrounds.

This is reflected in the strong representation of women we now have across the profession, and the encouraging diversity of our early talent programmes.

But we still have more to do to increase female representation at senior grades, although we have more female leaders at that level than elsewhere in the private sector.

And we also need to increase BAME and disability representation across the profession, again particularly at senior levels.

We are working with our champions and members of the profession to target action, for example around selection and development, drawing on the profession diversity data which has become available for the first time this year.

We are also working with others, particularly the professional bodies like the Major Projects Association and Association for Project Management, in supporting academic research on factors impacting gender balance in project delivery.

Principles

We need to get the basics right in government about how we deliver projects.

There are well understood principles for effective delivery, and we need to ensure that they are widely understood and used. For example:

- We need to improve and become more consistent at estimating costs, and develop benchmarking capability.
- We need to clearly identify, then freeze scope and focus much more on quality in the early initiation phase.
- We need to build a better understanding of risk into our programmes, so that we don't get locked into unrealistic point estimates, and use ranges.

As we all know, the success or failure of a project is often determined in its early stages, and it's much harder to turn a project around further down the line.

We need to close the gap between policy and delivery. Successful project initiation takes time and time is generally in short supply.

Government is focused on the deliverability of projects before announcements are made, doing preparatory and exploratory work on how to successfully implement and deliver the project.

If the right initiation work has been done upfront, then announcements can be made with confidence.

As part of this we are also reviewing our approach to assurance.

We want to be more agile, increase our expertise and focus on the outcomes of programmes to ensure that the assurance we're giving across government gives programmes and departments what they need.

We need to be clear about what good looks like; the principles and standards that underpin successful programmes, recognising the complex environment government operates in.

The [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery](#), published in 2018, sets out the basics.

Building on that, we will establish clear principles for successful project delivery, and progressively, update and consolidate our guidance and tools. This will create a coherent body of knowledge aligned to the standard, for government project professionals, delivery bodies, and suppliers to draw on.

Performance

We know that the current picture of performance as a whole is not good enough.

We know we have significant issues with planning, scheduling, and costings across major projects. However, this picture isn't uniform.

There is excellent practice out there, such as Network Rail's Modular Stations Programme, the use of real time technology at Bank Station or the use of standardised bridges and smart motorways by Highways England.

And we are responding to challenges and implementing lessons learned.

For example, we've worked across Government to identify and implement key lessons from [transport for the sponsorship of major projects in a published report](#).

We have developed [Transforming Infrastructure Performance \(TIP\)](#). An ambitious and long-term transformation programme that seeks to address the fundamental and interrelated challenges facing UK infrastructure and construction.

The programme prioritises investment in the right projects, improving productivity in delivery and maximising the overall benefits of infrastructure investment. It rightly challenges deliverability and performance.

It is about considering infrastructure and construction as a 'whole system' built up of projects, assets and networks of infrastructure and working through together to create a consistent and balanced pipeline for the future.

Conclusion

Delivering all major projects is a challenge.

That is why we need to be fit for the future, we need to level up in project management, in our people, in the skills available and in all regions of the UK.

We need to fix the system.

These are all problems we know well and the industry has been discussing for many years. But now is the time to take bolder action if we are to deliver the infrastructure revolution the public needs.

In the IPA we are focusing on creating a step change in the delivery and performance of infrastructure, closing the sector's well-known productivity gap, and encouraging strategic investment.

We have support for this agenda, right from the top of government so I am optimistic about the future for project and infrastructure delivery in the UK.

But we have work to do.

Thank you.

[New £2.5 million project launched to restore fragile marine habitats](#)

The future of England's most important underwater habitats have today (29 January) received an important boost after a marine restoration project received £2.5 million funding.

The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project, led by Natural England, will protect seagrass meadows – a critically endangered EU red listed habitat which are easily damaged and slow to recover. They are threatened by anchoring, mooring and launching of recreational boats, as well as trampling from walkers and bait collectors. The project will provide environmentally friendly moorings, voluntary codes, targeted training and habitat restoration, in five areas across southern England.

Seagrass meadows stabilise the seabed, clean surrounding seawater and absorb carbon, helping to prevent climate change. It has been estimated that seagrass around our shores can absorb and store at least as much carbon per hectare as trees in UK woodland. These plants are havens for many marine animals including rare seahorses, stalked jellyfish, and rare seaweeds. These

habitats are also perfect for fish nurseries, including commercially valuable flatfish such as plaice and flounder.

The five Marine Protected Areas, set to benefit from the funded project are: the Isles of Scilly, Fal & Helford, Plymouth Sound & Estuaries, Solent Maritime and Essex Estuaries Special Areas of Conservation.

Natural England Interim Chief Executive Marian Spain said:

We want to make sure that everyone can enjoy England's rich coastal landscapes, and this £2.5 million funding boost will help protect and restore critically endangered species and habitats as well as tackling climate change.

This project is a win-win-win for the planet, for people who use the sea and for the marine environment by protecting the delicate sea bed and restoring sea grass meadow, a vital carbon sink, as well as providing new places for boats to moor.

The scheme has been awarded £1.5 million from the EU's LIFE fund and is the result of more than 12 months of working together with several partner organisations including the Ocean Conservation Trust, Marine Conservation Society, Royal Yachting Association and Plymouth City Council. The other £1 million has been match funded from Natural England and the other partner organisations.

The project, running from July 2019 to October 2023, will be publicly launched at a project workshop at the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth tomorrow (30 January) looking at Advanced Mooring Systems that are more gentle on delicate underwater habitats, building on previous wildlife friendly mooring workshops run by the Royal Yachting Association.

The techniques and evidence drawn from Recreation ReMEDIES will be evaluated to measure the conservation benefit and assess how it could be repeated across Europe.

The programme will directly train nearly 2,000 recreational users, helping to:

- collect seed and replant seagrass (a first for England at this scale);
- inspire better care of the seagrass beds by recreational boat users;
- roll-out solutions including advanced mooring systems that are more gentle on delicate underwater habitats.

Phil Horton, Royal Yachting Association's Environmental and Sustainability Manager, said:

We are pleased to have the chance to show recreational boating and sensitive habitats coexisting. ReMEDIES is a great opportunity to exhibit Advanced Mooring Systems to recreational users.

Dr Jean-Luc Solandt, Principal Specialist, Marine Protected Areas, Marine Conservation Society, said:

Seagrass beds are massive carbon sinks, but have been severely reduced in English waters since the industrial revolution.

If – through this project – we are able to create new beds, and enhance existing ones, it will be of a huge benefit to fish and invertebrates. It will help secure and grow a habitat that is proven to absorb massive amounts of CO₂.

Mark Parry, Seagrass Specialist at the Ocean Conservation Trust, said:

We're delighted to be a part of this vitally important project to protect and restore seagrass habitats across the UK.

Seagrass meadows are amongst the most productive marine habitats in the U.K and offer a wide range of benefits to the coastal communities that live near them. With seagrasses in decline worldwide we're very excited to apply innovative techniques to seagrass ecosystem restoration to replace some of the lost benefits we see with decline of the habitat.

The project webpage and email address can be found below.

About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

Within England, Natural England is responsible for:

- promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- conserving and enhancing the landscape
- securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment
- find out more on [Natural England's website](#) and follow us on Twitter: @NaturalEngland

Natural England is the wildlife licensing authority for England's terrestrial environment under an agreement with the Secretary of State under section 78 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It took over responsibility for general licences in 2008.

About Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

- The RYA is the national body for dinghy, yacht and motor cruising, all forms of sail racing, RIBs and sports boats, windsurfing and personal watercraft and a leading representative for inland waterways cruising.
- The RYA is recognised by Government, the media and opinion formers as the representative body and voice for the activities that it represents. It continually fights for the rights and freedoms of its 112,000 personal members.
- The RYA has more than 1,500 affiliated clubs and classes, which represent some 350,000 boaters throughout the UK. It is estimated that 4 million people in the UK take part in boating activity annually.
- The RYA also sets and maintains recognised standards for training for both leisure and commercial boating through a network of more than 2,400 RYA Recognised Training Centres across 58 countries. More than 250,000 people per year complete RYA training courses.
- The RYA is responsible for one of the UK's most successful Olympic medal winning sports. Our coaching and development schemes actively support 800 of our country's top sailors, from talented juniors to Olympic and World champions.
- The RYA is committed to promoting all forms of boating and making them accessible to everyone. For more information please visit www.rya.org.uk.

About The Green Blue

- The Green Blue is the joint environment programme created by [British Marine](#) and the RYA. It was set up to encourage everyone who enjoys getting out on the water or whose livelihood depends on it, to do so as sustainably as possible. Its main purpose is to enable the UK recreational boating sector to decrease its impact on the environment by raising awareness amongst industry and users; reducing harmful discharges; reducing environmental disturbance; and encouraging sustainable choices.

About the Ocean Conservation Trust

- The Ocean Conservation Trust is an Ocean conservation charity that focuses on two key areas: habitat restoration and behaviour change. Following a conservation pathway that has been proven to work, the charity's approach puts people at the centre, working hard to create meaningful connections between people and the Ocean as the first step to inspiring long-term behaviour change. This is done in tandem with more traditional conservation work surrounding the monitoring and restoration of crucial Ocean habitats, with a particular focus on seagrasses. <https://www.oceanconservationtrust.org/>

About the Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum / Plymouth City Council.

- The Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum (TECF) is a collaborative partnership bringing together the key authorities responsible for the

management of the tidal waters of Plymouth Sound and Estuaries European Marine Site. Under the chair of the Queen's Harbour Master, members consist of five local authorities, four harbour authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation, Duchy of Cornwall and both Devon and Severn, and Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. Plymouth City Council is a unitary authority and has hosted TECF since it was first established in the early 1990s. It has a vision for Plymouth to be Britain's Ocean City and one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities which is sustainable and cares about the environment and is currently working towards creating Britain's first National Marine Park.

[Devolution talks underway in Leeds](#)

Treasury Minister Simon Clarke will convene a meeting with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to discuss a deal that would see the region to take control of extra powers and funding from Westminster, giving them more responsibility over local services. He will be joined by Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry and the leaders of Leeds, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield Councils.

The government is committed to levelling up opportunities so all corners of the country can benefit from economic growth and prosperity. A devolution deal for the Leeds City Region would empower a new metro mayor, with significant investment made available for local priorities and powers over areas such as transport and skills.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, the Exchequer Secretary Simon Clarke said:

We are determined to level-up opportunities so that all communities, including those here in West Yorkshire, get their fair share of our future prosperity.

Today we take a step forward by opening talks on a mayoral devolution deal for the Leeds City Region – right in the heart of the Northern Powerhouse.

This will give local people, who know their area best, the power to shape their own destiny.

Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry said:

This government is absolutely committed to transferring power, money and responsibility from Whitehall and putting it back in the hands of the people.

Our discussions with West Yorkshire represent a significant step forward in securing a workable devolution deal that will allow local people to reap the rewards of having a powerful, locally-elected mayor.