

Douglas Ross appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland



Following his appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Ross said:

I am delighted to have the opportunity to work alongside the Secretary of State for Scotland as we strengthen Scotland's place in the UK and deliver on our commitment to leave the EU at the end of next month.

The UK Government is firmly focussed on bringing the whole of the United Kingdom together.

We are determined to show how the UK works for Scotland. This includes driving forward our transformative investment of more than £1.4 billion in Scottish city and growth deals and progressing the UK Industrial Strategy

We'll ensure Brexit works for Scotland and all parts of the UK. It will mean great new opportunities for our fishing industry and coastal communities, it will allow us to tailor better support for our farmers and our exporters will benefit from new global trade deals.

We are also committed to building a better world for future generations and are ramping up our efforts to deliver a successful COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow.

I'm honoured and excited to be entering government at such an important time.

Published 17 December 2019

Motorists saving hundreds of thousands per day since Severn tolls' abolition

Motorists are collectively saving hundreds of thousands of pounds per day on the Severn crossings as the first anniversary since the removal of tolls is marked today [17 December]. All drivers are saving around £365,000 per day, based on the charges which were in place when the tolls were abolished.

The UK Government removed tolls on the westbound M4 and M48 crossings in December 2018, making it easier to travel between Wales and south west England with the aim of boosting business, enhancing inward investment, increasing tourism and creating jobs.

Since the tolls' abolition, journeys into Wales from England over the Prince of Wales Bridge have increased by 16% with an average of more than 39,000 journeys now being made each day.

Following the UK Government's abolition of the tolls, [the Western Gateway partnership was launched last month](#) to maximise the economic potential of south Wales and the south west of England.

By bringing together world-renowned universities, businesses and local authorities across a wide region either side of the Severn, the Western Gateway will mirror the successful, established work of the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine and will seek to ensure that the region is globally competitive.

UK Government Minister for Wales David TC Davies said:

Over the last year, drivers have reaped the benefits of free road travel into Wales which is paying dividends for businesses across both sides of the Severn.

We are better connected economically as a result and through the Western Gateway initiative we will harness the joint strengths of these two regions while respecting our distinct identities and traditions.

The UK Government is committed to boosting Wales' transport infrastructure and connectivity which is central to ensuring we raise our game economically and boost our productivity as a result.

ENDS

[VOA launches its 2020 graduate scheme](#)

The Chief Executive, Melissa Tatton, and Chief Valuer, Alan Colston, introduce the graduate scheme. They also discuss how the VOA continues to successfully develop the next generation of Chartered Surveyors.

Statement from Melissa Tatton, the Chief Executive of the VOA

Here at the VOA we know that the ideas, skills and enthusiasm graduates bring are invaluable. They are part of what helps the Agency thrive. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion means we welcome applicants from all kinds of backgrounds, helping us to truly represent the community we serve.

“Our graduate training programme aims to maintain our exceptional pass rate in the RICS Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). Our graduates are supported by experienced surveyors, counsellors and RICS assessors, and have access to the huge range of skills, knowledge and resource across the Agency.

Graduates who show future potential have the opportunity to progress quickly to the senior levels of our organisation, continuing support and development is a cornerstone of the VOA’s approach towards our people. We look forward to receiving your application, and helping you get ahead.”

Statement from Alan Colston, the Chief Valuer of the VOA

“At the VOA, surveying is at the heart of what we do. As Chief Valuer and Head of the Surveying Profession in the VOA, I am responsible for ensuring we adhere to the highest professional and valuation standards.

Our valuation expertise is vitally important to our customers, our people and our delivery partners, including those in central and local government. Developing our surveying profession with talented people is fundamental to our business.

With us, you’ll have the opportunity to work with some of the best surveyors in the country who will support you and advise you as you work your way through the graduate programme. The breadth and range of surveying work we do is unsurpassed and will allow you to get an excellent understanding of all aspects of the profession.

If you choose to join us, you will have access to:

- our wide professional network
- a dedicated supervisor and counsellor for the full duration of your training
- a structured training programme from Day 1 that will enable you to develop all the professional skills you need to meet the demands of the

APC

I look forward to welcoming you to the VOA.”

Find out more

If you're interested in finding out more and applying, there is information available on [Valuation Office Agency: Graduate scheme](#).

[Charity regulator investigates Oldham charity over governance matters](#)

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry into a charity associated with the Jamia Mohi Ul Islam Siddiqui Mosque in Oldham, as a result of serious regulatory concerns that there may have been misconduct or mismanagement in the administration of the charity.

The Alauddin Siddiqui Trust ([1159142](#)) was registered with the Commission in 2014 with objects to advance the Islamic religion, however the trustees have told the Commission that its main activities in recent years have involved sending £60,000 to Bangladesh in connection with the Rohingya crisis and £47,000 to Pakistan in connection with Qurbani expenditure*.

An apparent split has also led to the charity no longer providing a place of worship. The Oldham-based mosque appears to potentially be an asset of the charity, however Land Registry records show that the mosque is not currently registered as such, leading to concern about the potential loss of charitable assets.

There is also concern that the charity and a company by the same name have become merged to some extent. The Commission is concerned about the governance, management and administration of the charity, and the current trustees' ability to rectify the issues it has identified.

The regulator therefore opened a statutory inquiry on 31 October 2019, which will examine:

- the governance arrangements within the charity
- whether there has been any loss of charitable assets
- whether there is any ongoing risk to the charity's assets
- whether there has been misconduct and/ or mismanagement within the administration of the charity by its trustees;
- and whether the charity can be placed on a firmer footing for the future.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish

a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on GOV.UK.

Ends.

Notes to editors:

1. *Trustees cannot apply funds for purposes which fall outside of their charity's legal objects.
2. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers. It is not a finding of wrongdoing.
3. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.

[UK jobs market booms with record numbers in work](#)

New figures today show the UK jobs market continuing to thrive, as employment hits a record high and more families benefit from increased pay packets.

The employment level rose in 6 regions of the UK, including the North West which has a record high employment rate of 75.7%.

With unemployment remaining at its lowest level since the mid-1970s, 3.8%, women remain the biggest winners from a resilient jobs market – with 235,000 more in work in the last year.

And UK employees are receiving higher wages, as weekly pay continues to rise, outpacing inflation for the 21st month in a row.

More families are also benefiting from a regular wage as today's statistics followed recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) data showing 176,000 more children are living in a home with at least one working adult in just the last year.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Thérèse Coffey said:

At the end of this decade, I am delighted to see that more people are benefiting from rising wages and record high employment. Six out of the 9 UK regions have seen an increase in the number of people in work in the last year and I want to see it continue to

rise in every part of the country.

As we head into 2020 I'm clear that the focus of this government is on levelling up opportunities and aspiration across the entire United Kingdom. And it begins with getting Brexit done so we can unleash the potential of the people we serve and open up new investment for communities everywhere.

Read the [latest labour market statistics](#).