

Speech: Institute of Directors Annual Dinner speech

It's a great honour to be invited to speak this evening at the prestigious Institute of Directors Northern Ireland annual dinner and I am very grateful to you for your kind invitation.

Before coming to my main remarks I would like to pay tribute to the IoD and the work that you do.

Whether it's the professional support and development you provide for your members. Or by communicating your policy positions through the media or directly to ministers and officials, as you do so effectively, you play a key role in the business life of our country and in shaping public debate about economic and business strategy.

And on that note I would like to say that Ian Sheppard and Linda Brown have been outstanding members of the Business Advisory Group that I established in September.

They have ensured that the voice of the IoD here is heard loud and clear and they've contributed greatly to my understanding of local issues since my appointment last July as I seek to represent Northern Ireland's interests around the Cabinet table.

It's also fitting that the new IoD Director General Stephen Martin is with us this evening, his first official visit in his new role.

As we all know Stephen is originally from Northern Ireland, so it's great to know that Northern Ireland business has a friend and champion right at the top of the IoD.

Stephen's appointment speaks volumes about the massive business talent that we have here.

That was also demonstrated last October when Northern Ireland directors won a record five national titles at the IOD Director of the Year Awards, including the Overall Director of the Year Award for Brendan McGurgan of CDE Global.

Many congratulations to all of you and to the five others who were also highly commended. It's a great achievement for all concerned and you should be very proud.

I'm conscious as I stand here that this is supposed to be a fun and enjoyable evening, and we are all looking forward to being entertained later by Hal Cruttenden, but there's a serious side to proceedings too.

And I'm afraid it falls to me as Secretary of State to perform the serious role tonight.

As everyone here in this room is aware we gather here against a backdrop of great economic and political change and uncertainty.

So I want briefly to speak about three issues that I know will be of concern to everyone in the room.

First, the Government's plans to continue strengthening the economy, both here across the UK as a whole.

Second, about the decision of the people of the UK to leave the European Union.

And third, about the need for political stability here in Northern Ireland.

I will take all three in turn.

It's now nearly seven years since this Government began its mission to rescue the economy away from a culture of debt, spending and reckless irresponsibility that had delivered a rise in unemployment of over half a million, the biggest deficit in our peacetime history and the deepest recession since the war.

In May 2010 the UK stood on an economic precipice and we had two choices.

Continue as we were and risk economic ruin or chart a different course, dealing with our deficit, controlling spending and charting a course of fiscal responsibility.

Today, due to the often very difficult decisions we have had to make and the sacrifices and hard work of the people of the UK, the results are clear.

The deficit is down by nearly two thirds.

We have record numbers of people across our country in employment.

Last year we were the fastest growing of any major advanced economy in the world.

The Bank of England has just upgraded its economic forecasts for this year.

And it's not just a recovery for the south east of England, all regions of the United Kingdom have benefited.

Here in Northern Ireland the economy has seen solid growth. There are nearly 54,000 more people in work than seven years ago, while the number of people claiming unemployment benefits is down for the ninth month in a row and by over 49 per cent since its peak.

So, the fundamentals of the UK economy remain basically strong.

But as a government we recognise that there is still a great deal more to do if we are to realise the Prime Minister's driving mission of building an economy that works for everyone and not just the privileged few.

We need to recognise that one of the main lessons of the EU referendum is that there are far too many people in our country who struggle hard but only just manage to get by, who think the world works for others but not for them.

As a Government we've taken over a million of the lowest paid out of tax altogether including over 33,000 here in Northern Ireland.

We've introduced the first ever National Living Wage.

And we've reformed welfare to ensure that work always pays while ensuring that those who need help are always protected and delivering a fairer deal for the taxpayer.

And we're taking a number of measures to help business grow through our reforms to national insurance contributions, making it easier for businesses to employ people.

Through our £23 billion National Productivity Investment Fund, which will bring significant benefits here in Northern Ireland.

Through the development of a modern industrial strategy to ensure that our economy is fit to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

And of course through cuts to business taxes to ensure that we have the lowest rate of corporation tax of any economy in the G20.

On the subject of corporation tax let me reiterate this Government's commitment to devolving rate setting powers to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

It's a measure that can bring significant new investment, jobs and prosperity to Northern Ireland, you've campaigned for it and I want to deliver it.

The legislation is on the statute book but it can only be triggered if we have a stable, functioning devolved Executive with sustainable finances. So the power to bring about this change rests locally and I hope that message will be heard over the coming weeks.

Chairman, the picture I've set out means that I remain optimistic about our country's economic future and I remain confident that our economic future will remain bright as we embark on a new chapter in our country's history as we leave the European Union.

I appreciate the result in June came as a shock to many here in Northern Ireland but the democratic verdict of the people of the United Kingdom was clear.

And just as we joined the common market as one United Kingdom so we will leave the European Union as one United Kingdom.

This week the Bill enabling the Government to trigger Article 50 beginning our negotiation to leave the EU cleared its stages in the House of Commons and the week after next it will go the Lords who will, I hope, fully respect

the will of the elected Commons and the will of the people.

So we are on course to trigger Article 50 by the Government's stated timetable, no later than the end of March. In recent weeks through her speech at Lancaster House and the White Paper the Prime Minister has very clearly set out our key objectives in the negotiations that lie ahead.

Providing certainty wherever we can and putting the final deal to both Houses of Parliament.

Controlling our own laws and ending the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

Strengthening the precious Union between the four countries of our United Kingdom.

Maintaining the Common Travel Area with Ireland.

Controlling immigration from Europe while continuing to attract the brightest and best to study and work here.

Guaranteeing rights for British nationals in the EU and EU nationals living here.

Protecting workers' rights.

Pursuing an ambitious free trade agreement with the EU outside the single market but allowing for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and EU member states.

Striking new trade agreements with other countries around the world.

Keeping the UK as the best place for science and innovation.

Continued co-operation in the fight against crime and terrorism.

And finally a smooth, orderly departure with an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two year Article 50 process has concluded followed by a phased process of implementation.

This is the clear agenda of a Government that wants to build a new, positive and constructive relationship between the UK and the EU.

A new and equal partnership between an independent, self-governing, global UK and our friends and allies in the EU, fully recognising that it remains firmly in our national interest that the EU should succeed after we have left. Since June we have also been very clear about our determination to ensure that Northern Ireland's special circumstances are fully protected.

Things like the single electricity market.

And particularly in relation to the Border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

I am acutely aware that 60 per cent of all Northern Ireland's exports of goods to the EU go to Ireland. Over 14,000 people regularly commute across the border for work or study.

So in addition to the commitments about the Common Travel Area, the White Paper we published last week states explicitly that "we aim to have as seamless and frictionless a border as possible...so that we can continue to see the trade and everyday movements we have seen up to now." And that's a message that was underlined by the Prime Minister following her discussions with Enda Kenny in Dublin last week.

We're determined to get the best deal for Northern Ireland and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

In seeking to protect Northern Ireland's special circumstances the Government has of course sought to engage fully with the Northern Ireland Executive. That's been carried forward in a number of different formats, whether through bilateral meetings or participation in the Joint Ministerial Committee such as the one chaired by the Prime Minister in Cardiff just before she went to Dublin.

As the UK Government we want that level of engagement and participation to continue.

But that requires a fully functioning and stable, devolved Northern Ireland Executive, which leads me to my final point about the need for political stability here.

This Government stands four-square behind the key principles and political institutions set out in the 1998 Agreement and its successors.

And over the past decade Northern Ireland has seen the longest unbroken run of devolved government since the demise of the old Stormont Parliament in 1972.

Since the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements significant progress has been made areas such as addressing paramilitarism, reforming welfare and putting the Executive's finances on a sustainable footing.

Last summer's parading season passed off peacefully, and the long-running dispute in north Belfast has been resolved.

We've also been working intensively to build the necessary consensus to bring forward the bodies to address the legacy of Northern Ireland's past.

So I remain in absolutely no doubt that once this election is over what Northern Ireland needs is strong, stable, fair, accountable and effective, power sharing devolved government.

Devolved government to strengthen the economy, attract inward investment and spread prosperity.

Devolved government to ensure that Northern Ireland's special circumstances

are fully reflected as we respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by EU exit.

Devolved government to participate in continuing North/South practical co-operation.

Devolved government to build a stronger, shared society in which there is respect for everyone.

Political stability here has been hard gained over many years with considerable effort by people on all sides.

It has been taken forward by successive UK Governments, along with Irish Governments, US administrations, the EU and others.

The progress that's been made here has rightly been held up as an example to the world about how to overcome difference and work together for the good of the whole community.

So my final message tonight is this, let's not throw away that progress, that stability and that achievement.

I for one am not contemplating any other outcome but a resumption of devolved, partnership government.

That's what most people in Northern Ireland want and that's what we are working to deliver.

To build a brighter, more secure future for Northern Ireland.

To build a Northern Ireland that works for everyone.

[Press release: Foreign Office concerned at conviction of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny](#)

From:

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Part of:

The re-trial concluded by finding Alexei Navalny guilty and re-imposing his original five year sentence.

On 8 February 2017 a Russian court convicted Russian opposition politician, Alexei Navalny, on charges of embezzlement. The original case in 2013 was re-run after the European Court of Human Rights said Alexei Navalny was denied a fair trial.

An FCO Spokesperson said:

We are concerned at the conviction handed down to Russian opposition politician, Alexei Navalny. The judgement once again raises questions about the selective application of the rule of law in Russia. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the same charges in 2013 were politically motivated.

The conviction of Mr Navalny reflects a worrying trend in Russia where the space for public debate and legitimate opposition is shrinking ever further, and where political activists and civil society are facing increasing pressure. The UK urges Russia to uphold the principles of democracy and support political pluralism.

Further information

[News story: David Mundell in Brussels: Getting the best deal for the whole of the UK](#)

From:

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9 February 2017

The Scottish Secretary was in Brussels to discuss how the UK Government is representing Scotland as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

Scottish Secretary David Mundell met with Scottish MEPs, EU academics and business representatives in Brussels today [Thursday 9 February], to discuss how the UK Government is representing people and business interests in Scotland.

Mr Mundell also met with other European member states while in Brussels, as part of a two-day programme of European engagement on economic, social and cultural matters. Tomorrow [Friday 10 February] he will travel to Berlin.

Speaking after the meetings, Mr Mundell said:

The UK government has been forming a strong UK-wide evidence base as we prepare for negotiations to forge a new, mutually-beneficial partnership with Europe. Today I set out how the Scottish Government and the UK Government are working together to ensure we get the best deal for Scotland and the whole of the UK.

I also met representatives from a number of EU member states, and I was heartened to find a willingness to work with the UK as we leave the EU – underlining that we are leaving the EU but not leaving Europe.

Today [Thursday 9 February] Mr Mundell met:

- UK MEP Vicky Ford, chair of the European Parliament's single market committee.
- European thinktanks CEPS, Open Europe and Bruegel.
- The Permanent Representatives of several key European partners, including Italy, Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands.
- The CBI's Brussels representative.

Mr Mundell's visit is part of the UK Government's determination to get the best possible deal for Scotland and all parts of the UK as we leave the EU. This direct engagement will ensure that key figures in Brussels understand the UK's ambitions in delivering a deal that works for the UK and all of its nations.

In Berlin Mr Mundell will meet Scottish academic and business interests, and host a reception for the Edinburgh International Film Festival at the British Embassy. This will showcase the Edinburgh festival to the world's cinema industry, who will be in Berlin for the Berlinale.

Speech: Government at your service: Ben Gummer Op-Ed

To govern is to serve – that principle is in question.

As the Prime Minister has reflected, what occurred last June represented a direct challenge to the way that government operates and interacts with its citizens. Our collective faith in democracy and the relationship between the citizen and the state has faltered.

The referendum vote was a message not only to leave the European Union, but to address that gap that has come to separate those who govern and those whom we seek to serve.

If governing is to serve the people, it is the consistent delivery of effective and efficient public services for the citizen that underpins everything we do as a government. But while the vital work to improve and reform our everyday public services will continue throughout this Parliament – building upon fantastic achievements by my predecessors – there remains the question not simply of how public services work better for the user, but what public service actually means to the individual citizen.

Indeed, this is a question that transcends the professionalism and dedication of the thousands of committed civil servants I have the privilege of working with every day. They go to work wanting to do things for the better and for the public good. Yet that genuine spirit of public service is lost in the opaque interface that currently exists between the citizen and the state.

In too many of their interactions with government, the public is made to feel as though they are the servants of the government, rather than the other way around.

And it is not simply the user who is disadvantaged by this relationship. Public servants are not able to fulfil their vocation. We have asked them to work in poor buildings, to antiquated working patterns, in excessively hierarchical organisation structures, and with sub-optimal technology. By reducing the ability of our public servants to work productively, we are compromising their ability to serve the public.

It is my simple ambition to reverse that relationship. I want to see a revolution in the way we deliver public services – so that people up and down our country feel that government is at their service, at every single stage in the journey and at every single moment of every interaction.

The public has a right to expect the same quality of service from the government as they do from private providers.

Whether it is [filling in a tax return online](#), [paying council tax](#), [claiming Universal Credit](#), applying for a grant of probate, visiting a government building or [applying for a driving licence](#), the citizen's journey must be as efficient and smooth as possible – all while maximising value for money for the taxpayer and delivering our commitment to be the most transparent government in the world.

That is why I am today announcing four areas in which we will deliver the profound transformational shift that is necessary to restore faith in our democracy.

First, we will drive forward a renewed focus on digital government as the means to deliver services for the taxpayer. Today we are publishing our Government Transformation Strategy, outlining our commitment to utilise the virtues of technology to reshape government by ensuring millions of people are able to access online the services they need, whenever they need.

As well as moving as many services online as possible, we must harness the value of open data as a means to innovate and improve the range of services available to the public and enhance the transparency of government. We will appoint a new Chief Data Officer – alongside the assembly of a Data Advisory Board – in order to best align our efforts to make the best use of data across government and drive our open data and data transformation policies.

Third, we will work to ensure that our Civil Service has an equality of representation around the United Kingdom, so that public servants have a depth of experience of the public they serve. The Cabinet Office is currently reviewing the location of government agencies and arms-length bodies, and will consider relocating them where they could generate local areas of expertise, support private sector growth and enable a fairer distribution of Civil Service expertise, especially at a senior level.

And fourth, we will deliver all of these changes – and more – while maintaining this Government's constant drive to identify and drive efficiencies in government, root out fraud and error wherever possible, and make considerable savings for the hard-working taxpayer.

Every single member of the public deserves a government that is responsive, accountable and effective – twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week.

As I hope I am able to convey to you this morning, we will deliver our commitment to transform the relationship between the citizen and the state so that the latter serves the former – not the other way round. Only by doing so will we deliver the Prime Minister's commitment to build a country that truly works for everyone.

[News story: Applying for the 2017 Clinical Excellence Awards](#)

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ACCEA announces details of the 2017 Clinical Excellence Awards for new awards and renewals.

The 2017 Clinical Excellence Awards round will open on Tuesday 28 February and will close at 5:00pm on Tuesday 25 April. During this time, ACCEA will accept applications for new national awards and for some national award renewals.

You will need to put in a renewal application if:

- you received your current award in the 2013 round
- your award was last renewed in 2012 (awarded in 2008, 2003, 1998)

In some cases, consultants will be renewing out of the usual cycle. Awards are reviewed earlier if there is a change in job, or a significant change in job plan.

It is your responsibility to apply for renewal at the correct time. You can check whether your award is due to be renewed by [logging-in to your account](#). Dates for your renewal round can be found in 'award details'.

Please check that your contact details are up-to-date on our [online system](#) to make sure you receive reminder e-mails about your renewal and other communications from ACCEA.

We will publish the refreshed application guidance to [the ACCEA website](#) ahead of the round opening – there are no significant changes from the previous version.