

Press release: FCO dedicates room in celebration of its LGBT+ staff and their contribution to the department.

The head of the Diplomatic Service, Sir Simon McDonald, has officially opened the 'Watkins Room', demonstrating the FCO's recognition of the invaluable work of LGBT+ staff and coincides with the 20th anniversary of the founding of FLAGG, the department's LGBT+ staff association.

Sir Simon McDonald, the FCO's Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of HM Diplomatic Service said:

The Watkins Room honours the contribution and commitment of Graeme and all LGBT+ members of staff, past, present and future, to the Diplomatic Service.

This includes recognising the hard work of those colleagues who in the past may not have been able to be open about their identity at work. This month, we also mark the 20th anniversary of the FCO's LGBT+ Staff association, FLAGG, which Graeme co-founded. Since then, the FCO has made important progress to become a more supportive environment for LGBT+ diplomats and continues to work to ensure that our staff fully represent and champion the diversity of the UK today.

Jake Beesley and Lucy Monaghan, the co-chairs of FLAGG, said:

This marks a day of celebration for LGBT+ rights within the FCO, shining a spotlight on how far we've come since our staff association's founders, including Graeme, took a brave step to bring things up to date. We're proud to lead a community of LGBT+ staff, and straight allies, who continue this work today and who make the FCO a champion for LGBT+ rights, at home and overseas.

The Watkins Room is named after Graeme Watkins, diplomat and co-founder of FLAGG. Graeme was born in 1961 and joined the FCO in 1979, spending time in London, UKREP, Singapore and Managua. Sadly, he died in 2000. As a gay man working at the FCO, Graeme was subject to the bar on homosexuality which forbade openly gay men and lesbians from serving as diplomats until 1991.

As co-founder of FLAGG, Graeme left an important legacy to LGBT+ diplomats. His partner, friends and family were present at the opening of the 'Watkins Room' on 1 November to celebrate his contribution to the beginning of a campaign that has led to important changes within the FCO.

Today, FLAGG is a highly active staff association which works closely with the FC0 to champion the contribution of LGBT+ staff to UK diplomatic work overseas, including promotion of LGBT+ rights overseas. In the past year, a range of events have showcased this work, from the launch of a report into the history of homosexuality in the FC0 attended by Sir John Major (July 2017), to the month-long celebration of its 20th anniversary now underway.

Further information

Speech: UKEF services help hundreds of businesses every year

Under this government, [UK Export Finance \(UKEF\)](#), the UK's export credit agency, has been transformed into a responsive, competitive and effective supporter of UK exports. The government's [Export Strategy](#), published over the summer, puts UKEF at the heart of our offer to help British businesses succeed overseas.

And already there is growing recognition of UKEF and its world-class support for exporters; the CBI said in its Winning Worldwide report that "UKEF services have provided a vital complement to the private finance sector to help hundreds of SMEs" on their exporting journey.

Only last week, the British Exporters' Association awarded UKEF the highest rating of any European export credit agency for the fifth year in a row, recognising UKEF's commitment to strengthening its product range and developing new ways to reach out to exporters and their suppliers across the UK.

As Minister of State for Trade and Export Promotion, I am very proud of the work of UKEF. In 2017/18, UKEF provided £2.5 billion worth of support to help nearly 200 companies sell to 75 markets around the world. In turn, this is supporting thousands of skilled jobs and contributing billions to the UK economy, as well as improving infrastructure and growing industry abroad.

Projects like Offshore Cape Three Points, a transformational natural gas field in Ghana, which, with UKEF support worth US\$400 million, is helping the Government of Ghana reduce its dependence on oil and meet its COP 21 commitments for climate mitigation.

Or UKEF's US\$35 million loan to support Biwater's contract to deliver much-needed water treatment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Or JDR Cables' contract to supply subsea power cables to Danish company Dong Energy's offshore windfarms, providing non-carbon energy to the UK.

UKEF's mission is to ensure that no viable UK export fails for lack of

finance or insurance from the private sector. Its role is to provide support where the private sector can't, and so it is therefore demand-led.

I was therefore pleased to see earlier this week that the Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade is also taking note of its work. However, he expresses concerns about government support for companies exporting in the fossil fuels sector.

Supporting the UK's renewables sector is of the utmost priority for the whole of the UK government; we have world-leading suppliers in this sector, and want to do all we can to help them achieve international success. DIT has provided trade promotion support for renewables sector exports worth hundreds of millions, for example through tradeshow and sourcing procurement opportunities.

We welcome the opportunity to provide UKEF support to renewables sector exports – and in the last 2 years, have supported £310 million worth of contracts. However, there is significant liquidity in the private sector finance market for investment in renewables projects. Our aim is only to provide support where there is a lack of private sector finance, and the sector's export success – £500 million last year – shows that other sources are available.

On the other hand, the UK's oil and gas sector has suffered in recent years due to the long-term depression in oil prices and huge scale of financing needed to develop these projects. According to Oil and Gas UK, the sector supports more than 302,000 jobs – a decline of 160,000 since 2014. It is also vital to the UK's energy security. This sector needs support.

UKEF has also made clear its commitment to high standards of environmental, social and human rights risk management – rigorously following the OECD Common Approaches, which sets the framework for export credit agencies in ensuring these risks are mitigated.

In fact, UKEF is a member of the Equator Principles Steering Group, seeking multilateral progress on the environment and human rights for lending and large projects while maintaining a level playing field for UK businesses to compete internationally.

UKEF's role is to back UK businesses, of all sizes and in all sectors, stepping in where required and ensuring that the right support is in place to help them compete in a global marketplace and realise the benefits of international success. From this government's perspective, UKEF is doing this better than ever.

Press release: Proposals unveiled to cut red tape for divers retrieving marine litter

As part of the government's ongoing drive to clean up our seas, [new proposals](#) launched today (2 November 2018) will cut red tape and make it easier for divers to remove litter from the seabed.

Until now, a marine licence may be required for divers who retrieve litter or abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear – known as 'ghost gear' – during the course of a dive.

Now, in a consultation launched today by Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey, divers will be exempt from the current requirement to have a marine licence – streamlining the existing regime and helping to tackle the 640,000 tonnes of ghost gear lost in our oceans each year.

The consultation also brings clarity to boat users who do not require a licence to collect litter or ghost gear from the ocean's surface.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Diving communities play an important role in protecting our marine environment and tackling the litter and ghost gear that blights our oceans.

We want to make it easier for divers and other sea users to play their part, which is why we are looking at how we can cut red tape while still maintaining the highest protections for our precious marine life.

The proposals to tackle marine litter form part of a wider consultation on changes to the marine licensing system, designed to simplify the current rules and reduce unnecessary burdens on divers.

Existing marine licencing rules were introduced in 2011 to ensure activities such as construction and dredging are only permitted when they have taken into account environmental impact.

However, in recognition of the environmental benefits that marine litter retrieval can bring, the licensing rules have now been reviewed to allow divers to use equipment such as a lifting bag, a vessel or an aircraft to remove marine litter – while ensuring they still uphold the highest protections for habitats, protected species and items of archaeological or historical interest.

Chair of the [British Sub-Aqua Club](#) Alex Warzynski said:

As divers we see first-hand the damage to the marine environment done by abandoned and lost fishing gear along with other marine litter, and anything that Defra can do to make it easy for divers to clean up without fear of doing the wrong thing will help.

The new proposals will also allow harbour authorities to remove all marine litter as previously they have only been able to remove objects that present an immediate risk of obstruction or danger to navigation.

The UK Government joined the [Global Ghost Gear Initiative](#) (GGGI) in 2017, a consortium founded by World Animal Protection to collectively address the fishing litter issue.

Today's announcement is the latest step in the government's ongoing plan to tackle marine litter in our oceans. This includes a world-leading ban on [microbeads](#) which harm marine life, and plans to ban the sale of [plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds](#) and introduce a [deposit return scheme](#) to drive up the recycling of drinks bottles and cans, subject to consultation.

The government also launched the [Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance](#) (CCOA) earlier this year which has seen member states join together in the fight against plastic pollution.

As one part of CCOA, the Commonwealth Litter programme will support six countries across the Commonwealth to develop their own national litter action plans focusing on plastics entering the oceans.

The [consultation](#) opens on 2 November and runs for 6 weeks.

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Press release: ‘A golden era’ heralded for North East as North of Tyne devolution deal becomes law

The signing of the Parliamentary Order by Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry last night (1 November 2018) formally confirmed the ground-breaking North of Tyne deal – an unprecedented transfer of devolved power and investment funding from Westminster to the North East.

Encompassing the area north of the Tyne river, the deal includes the 3 North of Tyne authorities – Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

Expected to generate £1.1 billion for the local economy, 10,000 new jobs, and drive over £2.1 billion in private sector investment, the landmark deal will provide a major economic boost for a key region within the Northern Powerhouse. It also includes:

- Over £600 million of government funding (£20 million a year for 30 years) to drive forward investment in digital skills, science and rural growth.
- The creation of a new North of Tyne Combined Authority and a directly-elected North of Tyne Mayor with the election planned for May 2019.
- A new Inclusive Growth Board to take forward skills and employment reforms across the area, including a pioneering North of Tyne Education Improvement Challenge to drive excellence in schools across North of Tyne.

Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry MP, said:

This deal represents over £600 million of investment into the North of Tyne and a landmark moment for devolution in the Northern

Powerhouse with a new, directly elected mayor who will be a strong champion for the region.

The North of Tyne devolution deal is further proof that we're witnessing a new golden era for the North East as the combined authority uses this unprecedented investment to improve public services, create new jobs and new economic opportunities.

We're transferring funding and decision making away from Westminster and placing them directly into the hands of local people, allowing them to have a real say over their future.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Robert Jenrick MP, said:

The creation today of the North of Tyne Combined Authority is the culmination of a huge amount of hard work by local leaders.

The deal delivers £600 million of new government investment for the region over the next 30 years to fund key local priorities.

This move will put more power into the hands of local communities, with the people of Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland voting next May for a new directly-elected mayor to lead this vital work.

Councillor Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council, said:

Today marks a significant day in the north's devolution journey. We've begun the work of uniting behind a single voice and taking control of our future.

We still have much more to do in bringing further powers and decision making back to people here, but this devolution deal marks a big step forward in our plans to create more and better jobs across Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

Now we need to get on with the task at hand, investing in our region and showing the nation and beyond why this is such a great place to live, work and visit.

North Tyneside's Elected Mayor, Norma Redfearn CBE, said:

This is a historic day for the region. The North of Tyne area already boasts one of the fastest growing economies and job rates anywhere in the UK and this will offer us greater opportunities to grow and develop.

We have shown that we are big enough and bold enough to carve our

own destiny and devolution puts us in a very strong position to build on our strengths and achieve great things for all of our businesses and residents long into the future.

Councillor Peter Jackson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, said:

So much work has gone into securing the best deal for the North of Tyne and I'm delighted we can now move forward with the real business of driving the region's economic growth.

We're working on a number of exciting and transformative schemes which will benefit millions of people in the region now, as well as future generations, and we are all excited by the opportunities that lie ahead.

An inaugural cabinet meeting at Morpeth Town Hall will assign cabinet roles and responsibilities, set the budget for 2018 to 2019, and agree a timetable for the selection of an interim mayor to support the North of Tyne Combined Authority ahead of an election in May 2019.

The cabinet will also sign-off the North of Tyne's economic vision, titled Home of Ambition, a statement which will underpin and guide the authority's ambitions and investment priorities for years to come.

At Budget 2017, following Cabinet agreement, the government announced it was 'minded to' agree a devolution deal with the 3 councils north of the Tyne (Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council and Northumberland County Council) providing a mayoral combined authority was established and the councils took the statutory steps for the proposed devolution of powers.

The Parliamentary Order for the North of Tyne Devolution Deal was laid on the 24 July 2018. The approval of the North of Tyne motion in the House of Lords on Thursday (1 November) and the signing of the order by Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry MP, preceded the creation of the new North of Tyne Combined Authority.

The Combined Authority will have wide-ranging powers including control over housing policy – a policy area in which the 3 councils have already made significant progress. The new North of Tyne Housing and Land Board, chaired by Sir Edward Lister, held its inaugural meeting on Friday 6 July in Newcastle to discuss how to rapidly accelerating house-building in the North of Tyne. The 3 North of Tyne councils committed to an increase in a rate of delivery from 1,800 to 3,000 new homes per year up to 2032, helping to provide much-needed homes more quickly.