

# Press release: UK host Australia-UK ministerial talks

The UK Government will host Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop and Australian Minister for Defence Marise Payne in the UK for the 10th Australia-United Kingdom Ministerial Consultations (AUKMIN) on Friday 20 July 2018.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson will join their counterparts for discussions of high level foreign policy, defence and security issues between the United Kingdom and Australia. This AUKMIN marks over a decade since the talks began and is a chance for both nations to reflect on the enormous progress made over that time.

Speaking ahead of the talks Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Australia is one of the UK's closest allies and I am delighted to be co-hosting Foreign Minister Bishop and Defence Minister Payne so soon after being appointed as Foreign Secretary. Our relationship with Australia is based on shared history, interests and values, and we have a dynamic modern friendship including a significant exchange of people and goods. The recent commissioning of nine warships from BAE, to be manufactured in Australia, is a sterling example of this relationship in action.

I look forward to our continued work together on global challenges and opportunities – based on our shared respect for the rules-based international system. The fight against extremism and terror, eliminating modern slavery and encouraging global co-operation will be top of the agenda during this tenth AUKMIN. Talks with businesses and government on boosting trade between us when we leave the EU will also be a top priority.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are entering an exciting new era for Britain and Australia with our two nations having one of the strongest relationships in the world. With both our world class Armed Forces respected and present all over the globe, defence is one of the pillars of our deep and enduring relationship.

The £20 billion Global Combat Ship deal between BAE Systems and the Australian Government demonstrates how defence and our Armed Forces

are not just vital to keeping us safe but also crucial to delivering prosperity, jobs, and keeping our two countries at the height of innovation and advanced manufacturing. I look forward to strengthening our historic defence relationship further this week.

The United Kingdom has a strong and dynamic relationship with Australia underpinned by common values, shared heritage and a closely aligned strategic outlook. Military ties between the 2 nations are deep and long-standing, including a range of operational and intelligence activities such as joint-operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The recent awarding of a £20 billion contract from the Australian Government to BAE Systems to build nine British Type 26 Global Combat Ships is a demonstration of the relationship between the 2 countries creating a safer world.

### **Further information**

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## **[Government response: UK government calls for investigation over Cameroonian footage of killing of women and children](#)**

Commenting on the recent video circulating in Cameroon of men wearing military-style uniforms executing two women and two children, Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin said:

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the images circulating in Cameroon of the horrific killings of four women and children by perpetrators in military-style clothing, including allegations that those responsible may be members of the Cameroonian armed forces.

I welcome President Biya's decision to open an urgent investigation. Those responsible must face justice for their appalling actions – there is no justification for these actions.

### **Further information**

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## News story: New multi-million pound deal to boost skills across West Midlands

Businesses, young people and adults across the West Midlands are set to benefit from a new skills deal, which could unlock up to £69million, the Education Secretary has announced today (18 July).

The skills deal agreed with the West Midlands Combined Authority will boost digital and technical skills, job opportunities and productivity across the region – supporting more young people and adults into work as well as upskilling and retraining local people of all ages.

The Government will co-fund the new skills deal, alongside employer funding and the West Midlands Combined Authority will invest £20million into this area as set out in their Skills Plan.

The new deal includes:

- Creating hundreds of new apprenticeships at small and medium sized businesses in priority areas, including in construction, automotive and digital sectors – helping increasing job opportunities for all.
- A multi-million investment in local colleges – ensuring they have access to the latest equipment and facilities to teach the skills the region and the country need, including digital, and construction.
- Up to £5million to work with employers to develop a National Retraining Scheme (NRS) pilot to drive adult learning and retraining.
- £1million to boost Edtech and the way it supports adult learners in the West Midlands.
- £1million to improve careers advice for young people, including a new careers hub in the West Midlands.
- Piloting an innovative online portal for businesses to share work experience opportunities with schools.

Some of this country's most acute skills challenges are found within the West Midlands, which the skills deal will aim to address through the new funding and support for the West Midlands economy, driving local growth. This deal builds on the work already underway through the Government's modern Industrial Strategy, which aims to boost productivity and earning power across the country. This includes investing in maths, digital and technical education to help generate well-paid, highly skilled jobs across the country.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

The West Midlands is the engine of our thriving economy, but we want to make sure even more local people have the skills they need to get on in life, while also boosting the region's productivity

and technical expertise.

This new skills deal will provide the right investment so that both young people and adults have the chance to learn, upskill, retrain and take advantage of the range of exciting jobs in areas such as construction, cyber security and digital technology.

By supporting apprenticeships in small and medium sized businesses, more people will be able to earn and learn and the focus on digital and technical skills, which are both in high demand, will help people to get the skills they need to get the jobs of tomorrow.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street said:

Every time I speak to businesses in West Midlands, the number one issue that keeps getting fed back to me as the barrier for growth is skills. We know best the challenges facing West Midlands businesses and, among the colleges and educational institutions, we know how to tackle them.

This deal means more apprenticeships and more money for adult education, career advice and technical education which is brilliant news for both businesses and young people. But perhaps more importantly, this new way of working with Government means we have new powers and resource to help deliver the right outcomes for the West Midlands and for Government.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Esther McVey said:

As part of this investment we will be introducing new progression coaches so young people can get extra support to guide them when making choices about their future – whether that's choosing to go straight into work, an apprenticeship, further training or education. Enabling them to make the most of the opportunities on offer.

To help boost the region's digital and cyber skills Government will launch a new Local Digital Skills Partnership in the West Midlands bringing together regional businesses, local authorities and educational institutes to tackle the digital skills gap and support the growth of the local economy.

Digital Minister Margot James said:

There should be no digital divide. Every individual and business should have the skills and confidence to make the most of the huge opportunities modern technology brings.

These new schemes will give people from all ages and backgrounds in the West Midlands the chance to improve their digital and cyber skills and play a vital part in helping us build a Britain that is fit for the future.

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## [Press release: Secretary of State pledges action on vital public appointments](#)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, has today set out important action to ensure vital public appointments can be made in Northern Ireland, in the continued absence of an Executive or a sitting Assembly at Stormont.

The Secretary of State has instructed officials to work on legislation over the summer that would allow UK Government Ministers to make pressing appointments to leading public bodies.

The legislation would address crucial appointments needed for the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to function.

The Policing Board has not been properly constituted since the 2017 Assembly election, as it has not had the political members it requires. NIJAC has fallen to a very low membership, particularly in its legal and judicial representation, affecting its capacity to operate. And the Probation Board's entire membership will expire in November unless new appointments are made.

If there is no Northern Ireland Executive in place in the autumn, the Secretary of State will introduce the legislation at Westminster.

The Secretary of State said:

The UK Government's priority is to restore the devolved institutions at Stormont. In the meantime, I have been clear that I will continue to take any urgent and necessary action to protect good governance and the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

I hope that an accommodation can be reached and an Executive formed so that Northern Ireland Ministers can make these important appointments in the autumn. If not, I am prepared to bring forward

legislation to enable these appointments to be made to ensure that these bodies can continue their vital work.

Existing legislation confers responsibility for the most significant public appointments in Northern Ireland on Northern Ireland Ministers. In the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers, new legislation will be needed in the UK Parliament to enable certain key Northern Ireland appointments and a small number of appointments to UK-wide bodies to be made. The Northern Ireland appointments include a number of nominated members of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, in which the ministerial role is a formal one.

While work on this legislation continues over the summer, the UK Government will continue to engage closely with the political parties, and the Irish Government as appropriate, to encourage and support work towards an accommodation to restore the Executive.

PDF, 7.93KB, 1 page

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## **[Press release: A38 verges in Devon being transformed for bees and butterflies](#)**

Environment-conscious drivers may be concerned to see areas of wild vegetation being removed on the roadside of the A38 in Devon over the coming weeks, but it's all in a good cause.

The land is being cleared to make way for a colourful carpet of native grasses and wild flowers that will form part of a wildlife corridor along Highways England roads in Devon and Cornwall.

Highways England ecologist Leo Gurbert explained:

The grassland and scrub growing on parts of our verges is known as 'rank grassland' and doesn't support a wide variety of species, particularly bees and butterflies, as it has limited biodiversity value.

By replanting with a wider variety of native grasses and wildflowers we'll be able to provide a much more wildlife friendly environment for a range of pollinators and insects, some of which are in decline.

The planting is taking place at 11 sites on the A38 between Ashburton and Wrangaton and will create almost six hectares of new grassland which will be enhanced by planting native perennial species including; yellow rattle and bird's foot trefoil.

Leo added:

As well as pollinators such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies the new areas should support further biodiversity such as invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals and it should improve the appearance of the road and journey experience for everyone using it.

The Highways England grassland planting schemes are now in their third year and a total of 10 hectares have been planted along the A30 and A38 in Devon and Cornwall.

The seeds being planted this year have been sourced from a nearby farm to make sure the plants are as local as possible.

The scheme is being delivered under Highways England's national [Biodiversity Plan](#) which is being supported by a £30 million national investment programme over the next five years.

The plan recognises road verges and associated land can be managed to provide great areas of wildlife habitat, relatively free from human access, that are often scarce in the surrounding landscape.

These road verges can also be used to connect fragmented habitats in the wider landscape, enabling plant and animal populations to move and interact, and so become stronger and more resilient.

The project also aligns with DEFRA's National Pollinator Strategy and environmental charity's Buglives' B-line initiative, which aims to create a nationwide network for pollinating species such as bees.

The scheme involves three phases of work between Monday, 23 July and Friday, 28 Sept 2018.

This work will be carried out overnight when traffic flows are at their lowest to keep disruption to a minimum and while most sites will require lane closures no delays are anticipated.

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.