

Statement to Parliament: EU Transport Council 29 and 30 October 2018

I attended the informal meeting of members of the Transport and Environment Councils in Graz, Austria on 29 and 30 October.

The programme for the Informal meetings included separate sessions for Transport and Environment Ministers and a joint session for both Ministers entitled 'Starting a new era: clean, safe and affordable mobility for Europe'.

On 29 October, Transport Ministers were invited to discuss the Commission's proposal on 'Discontinuing seasonal changes of time (summer time)'. My Noble Friend, The Rt Hon Lord Henley, (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) represented the UK at this session and explained that the UK government does not support the proposed directive. He also noted the Commission had fallen short on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as has been highlighted by the decision of the House of Lords to issue a reasoned opinion. (The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee has subsequently recommended that the House of Commons also issue a reasoned opinion on this matter.)

There was broad consensus in Council that the timetable proposed by the Commission was too short and thus there was widespread support for the Presidency's intention to provide for an extension. A small minority of Member States were notably critical of the proposal while the majority welcomed the initiative, albeit noting its deficiencies. Several Member States advocated the need to coordinate across borders in order to know the final time zone arrangements before taking the decision to abolish daylight saving.

Environment Ministers were then invited to discuss 'The Future of European Environmental Policy'. The Secretary of State for the Environment was represented by officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Ministers broadly agreed on the need for an eighth Environment Action Programme (EAP) with a consensus that it should take full account of climate change given the Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on Global Warming of 1.5 Celsius published last month.

At the joint session for Transport and Environment Ministers on 30 October, interventions were wide-ranging with common themes being the need to move towards zero emissions vehicles and enabling people to choose sustainable ways to travel. These themes were reflected in the Presidency's 'Graz Declaration' published after the meeting. For the UK, I stressed the importance of ambition to accelerate the development and introduction of zero emission vehicles, recalling that the Prime Minister had hosted the world's first zero emission vehicle summit in Birmingham recently.

The subject for the afternoon session was road safety. Transport Ministers

shared experiences with progress to date in reducing casualties and their perception of the challenges in making more progress. In my intervention I noted that human error was a factor in over 85% of road accidents, and that connected and automated vehicles offered opportunities to make our roads safer.

In the margins I met with a number of EU Transport Ministers to discuss current EU transport business and how relationships will evolve as the UK leaves the EU.

[News story: Next phase of multi-million pound college improvement fund launches](#)

More colleges will benefit from a multi-million pound initiative to drive improvements across further education as the second round of the Strategic College Improvement Fund (SCIF) [launches today](#) (6 November).

The Government is transforming technical education in this country, introducing new, gold standard T Levels from 2020 – the technical equivalent to A Levels – and supporting the creation of more high quality apprenticeships.

The SCIF was launched in June 2018 following calls from the sector for a peer-to-peer support programme where stronger colleges help weaker ones to improve. It follows a successful pilot phase, which saw fourteen colleges receive grants totaling over £2million. Outcomes from the pilot showed strong support for the partnership model, and led to colleges reporting that the fund helped build awareness of good practice, fostered mutual learning and enabled rapid action to improve quality.

Alongside the National Leaders of Further Education and National Leaders of Governance programmes, the £15 million SCIF is playing a vital role helping to share best practice, expertise and boost standards so more people can access high quality education and training. Colleges in need of support can apply for funding to work with a stronger ‘partnering’ college to tackle the issues they face and improve quality.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

Colleges are an extremely important part of our education system, and are absolutely central to our technical education reforms. They play an essential role in making sure people of all ages and backgrounds have the skills they need to get on in life.

I'm thrilled to invite even more colleges to apply for funding from the SCIF. By working together with top colleges, they will get the support they need to make sure their learners get the very best education and training. This will mean more opportunities for people right across the country to access high-quality education and training.

David Corke, Director of Policy at the Association of Colleges, said:

We've been working closely with the Government on this initiative and it's now great to see the development of a peer improvement programme from a sector capacity and capability point of view. It is important to continue to share best practice and look at ways we can continually drive up quality within the sector.

Sixth Form Colleges Association Chief Executive Bill Watkin said:

The Strategic College Improvement Fund has already made a difference to several colleges and the students who attend them, with its focus on identifying where needs are and how those needs can best be met. The SCIF is a valuable framework that supports the sharing of good practice, ensuring that areas for development can be addressed through collaborative approaches with well-matched partners.

We are delighted that Round 2 has been launched and highly recommend that colleges take this opportunity to work with each other to raise, and sustain, standards across the sector.

Deputy Further Education Commissioner SCIF Lead Teresa Kelly said:

It is very exciting that the SCIF has been taken up so positively by the sector and is proving to be a significant tool for quality improvement in colleges. Through the SCIF many colleges are now harnessing the best practice that exists within the sector and applying proven best practice in order to improve the quality of their offer and provision.

The SCIF is enabling colleges to deep dive into developing and improving practical classroom based teaching techniques that will improve the student experience and ultimately the overall performance of the sector.

The list of successful colleges and their partners from the first application round will be published later this month.

Press release: Readout of PM call with Sebastian Kurz: 5 November 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz this evening.

The Prime Minister updated the Chancellor on the progress of Brexit negotiations saying that 95% of the Withdrawal Agreement was now complete, and that she was confident that a solution could be found on the Northern Ireland backstop.

The Prime Minister added that the UK wanted to see quick progress and that both the UK and the EU were working hard to achieve an agreement.

Chancellor Kurz said that the Austrian Presidency stood ready to help facilitate an agreement as soon as possible.

Press release: Readout of PM call with Justin Trudeau: 5 November 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau this evening.

The Prime Minister said she was delighted that Canada had selected the UK's cutting-edge Type 26 warship for its future frigate programme, noting it demonstrated the strength of our defence relationship.

They discussed Saudi Arabia and the appalling murder of Jamal Khashoggi, agreeing that there remained an urgent need to establish what had happened and for those responsible to be held to account.

They agreed that the international community should continue to encourage a thorough, credible, and transparent investigation by

the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

On Yemen, they agreed on the pressing need to alleviate the humanitarian situation and reach a political solution. The Prime Minister said we supported the US call for de-escalation in Yemen, noting that it must be underpinned by a political deal between the conflict parties.

They looked forward to seeing each other at the G20 summit in Argentina at the end of the month.

Statement to Parliament: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has made a statement to the House today.

Mr Speaker, I'd like to make a statement on the changes announced to Universal Credit in the Budget last week and on the Managed Migration regulations, which we are laying in the house today.

The Chancellor announced a substantial package at the Budget to ensure that millions keep more of what they earn, and vulnerable claimants are supported when they move to Universal Credit.

In total, Mr Speaker, this package will be worth an extra £4.5billion across the next 5 years.

I want to pay a special thank you to all the colleagues, charities, third-sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants who fed back to me to build this package of support to ensure Universal Credit is a fair system – supporting thousands who can't work as well as thousands who can.

And I'd like to also thank my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister and my Right Honourable Friend the Chancellor for their support to deliver these measures.

Because make no mistake, Mr Speaker: this is a department that listens. And a department that will continue to listen, adapt, change and deliver.

We will put an extra £1.7billion a year into work allowances, increasing the amount that hardworking families can earn by £1,000 before Universal Credit is tapered away – providing extra support for 2.4million working families.

Which is why it was welcomed not only in this House, but amongst charities.

Like the Child Poverty Action Group, which said: "The work allowance increase

is unequivocally good news for families receiving Universal Credit”.

And the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said this extra investment “will help make Universal Credit a tool for tackling poverty”.

And, we have gone further – recognising the genuine concerns raised about the support we were offering people, especially to the most vulnerable, when they move to Universal Credit.

So we have made a further £1 billion package of changes, providing 2 additional weeks of DWP legacy benefits for those moved onto Universal Credit – a one-off non-repayable sum that will provide claimants with extra money during the period before they receive their first Universal Credit payment.

And this is on top of the 2 additional weeks of Housing Benefit announced at Autumn Budget 2017, and put into place this year.

And we will support the self-employed moving to Universal Credit.

We will open up a 12-month grace period before the Minimum Income Floor is applied, supporting 130,000 self-employed claimants.

Because we are the party of business, we are the party of aspiration.

We will support those in debt by reducing the normal maximum rate at which debts are deducted from Universal Credit awards, from 40% to 30% of Standard Allowances.

This will help over 600,000 families to manage their debts at any one point when roll out is complete – providing them with, on average, £295 extra a year as their debts are repaid over a longer period.

Mr Speaker, this is targeted support to help work pay and support the vulnerable.

Which is why today I lay regulations to deliver the next phase of Universal Credit – Managed Migration.

Through which people will be moved onto Universal Credit.

A move from a system that trapped people on benefits and creating cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours with punitive effective tax rates of over 90 per cent for some.

Between 1997 and 2010, benefit spend went up by 65%.

In 1997, households were paying £5,500 in taxes to fund the benefits system – and by 2010 it had risen to £8,350.

[Political content]

Under this Government 3.4 million more people are in work – the vast majority of which are full-time and permanent roles.

Which means that we have created more new jobs in the UK since 2010, than France, Spain, Ireland, Netherlands, Austria and Norway combined.

Alongside creating a welfare system that supports those who need it.

Through Universal Credit, around 1 million disabled households will receive around an extra £100 on average per month through more generous support.

The managed migration regulations will, in addition:

- protect 500,000 people's Severe Disability Premium at the point of migration
- deliver Transitional Protection for those we move, to ensure that at the point of moving, those managed migrated have their entitlements protected

We will take a measured approach to delivering Managed Migration, taking our time to get it right and working with claimants to co-design it.

We have and will continue to take on board the advice of experts and charities.

Such as the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) – whose [report on the regulations we have published, along with our response today](#).

And we have accepted in full or part all but one of their recommendations.

And the one we didn't is because we want to be more generous!

I pay tribute to the hard work of SSAC in scrutinising our regulations.

And we have changed a key part of the regulations, which charities have raised with me, my department and MPs.

Which relates to the minimum statutory notice period for people moving from their legacy award to Universal Credit.

We have extended this period from a minimum of 1 month to a minimum of 3 months – to allow claimants maximum time to prepare and make their claim before their legacy award expires.

Alongside this, we have unlimited flexibility to extend claim periods for people who need it.

We will also backdate any claimant who has missed the deadline date, but has made a claim within a month of the deadline day passing.

And we will test a variety of communications methods, including advertising campaigns, face to face communication, letters, texts, telephone calls and home visits.

Mr Speaker, this will provide support for claimants during managed migration.

And we will constantly review our approaches, engage fully with charities, experts, claimants and all members of this House.

Mr Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.