

# Speech: Chief Secretary: Enterprise Nation remarks

It is brilliant to be here this morning with such an amazing view.

I do believe that we are fundamentally an enterprising nation and that is one of the many things that's exciting about Britain.

Sometimes to appreciate your own country you have to travel overseas. Recently I did a trip to Korea and Japan and they were saying to me, "How can we get the same kind of start-up culture that you have in Britain?", "How can we attract that investment in early stage businesses? or "How can we have that energy that we see every time we come to London?"

I think we've got to appreciate what we've got, and in the last year there's been a 5% increase in business registrations.

The momentum hasn't stopped. What is also very interesting is the attitudes of generations that are under 21.

They're more likely to want to start up a business than previous generations and they're doing it in droves, as we've seen an 85% increase in 18 to 24 year olds setting up businesses just in the last three years alone.

I had a group of those businesses called '20 under 20' in my office in the Treasury talking to them about when they'd start up their business what motivated them, and most of them said that it was at age 11 that they'd first thought of their idea. They struggled with some of the hurdles – like they couldn't open bank accounts to other sorts bureaucratic difficulties – but they persisted and actually due to new technology, due to the availability of things like YouTube and podcasts to be able to get wider advice or to be able to network with a wider world – they ultimately had succeeded in their ambition. It is those ideas, and it is these people that drive progress in our country.

In the 1960s we had an expression the 'jet set' because only the very rich could afford to travel round the world, but now thanks to new entrants it is a lot cheaper now and many more people can afford to travel. Or, what about supermarkets. I remember when getting pasta was exciting in the supermarket and now you can buy all kinds of things from fish sauce to won tons; you can get anything you want at your local Sainsbury's, again that's down to enterprise.

Even the internet itself, where the derivation of that idea came from Britain and great people like Ada Lovelace or Tim Berners Lee. Quite often we hear negative things and of course there are harms that we need to deal with, but a recent survey showed that 82% in Britain had said the internet had made their lives better. None of us have to get bored waiting in a queue at the supermarket anymore, we can use our time much more productively. We are

seeing all this progress and sometimes I think we take that progress for granted. But the reason we've got that progress is because of the individuals that come forward and there has never been a better system than the system of free enterprise for harnessing the ideas and dreams of individuals.

For me it's not just about economics. Of course, it is important that we get economic growth up. Of course, it is important that people that are able to afford to live better lives and that they are able to get better food for their children and get better opportunities. But starting businesses is also important for that sense of fulfilment and self-determination for individuals and that is one of the reasons that I do love meeting entrepreneurs, because you are people with dreams who want to bring those dreams to reality and there's something really exciting about that.

British start-ups are also an area where it doesn't matter what your background is. It doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter what gender you are. If you've got a good enough idea, if you're prepared to work hard enough; if you're prepared to fulfil those ambitions; or if there's somebody out there who wants to buy what you've got to offer, you can do that and you don't have to be ticked off by a piece of government bureaucracy.

I think that's incredibly empowering and one of the areas that I'm very interested in the whole area of female entrepreneurship, because we do know there are fewer female entrepreneurs than male entrepreneurs. If we had as many female entrepreneurs as male entrepreneurs we'd have 1.2 million more businesses in this country, and I do see it as a source of empowerment, as a source of being able to take control of your own life and run your own life.

So what can the government do about this? First of all I think we need to be positive. Emma mentioned Brexit and the Brexit vote. I believe we will get a deal. I believe we're very close to getting a deal. It's always darkest just before dawn and I think that is the situation we have at the moment, but there is a definitely a will and you can sense it across Parliament, and you can sense it across the country that people who have been debating this issue for two years.

There are various permutations of exactly what we could do, but we want to get on with it. Leave the EU in an ordered way and in a way which provides the security and stability for everybody to carry on living their lives, but also so that we can carry on trading with the EU which is a vitally important market, as well as reach out further into other markets.

I would point out that many overseas markets are already doing extremely well, and we've seen our exports rise across the world. What does the government do next? In my role as Chief Secretary to the Treasury I'm in charge of public finances. We currently spend a £800 billion a year as a government and this year will be the year of the Spending Review and that's where we set our government budgets for 2020. I think that's a massive opportunity for us as we leave the European Union to reform our economy and to look at how we spend public money, and if we are we spending it right to deliver the maximum possible opportunities for people across the country.

First of all the challenge is to be able to keep taxes low. Often my number one job is saying 'no' to people who want to spend more money because I know that ultimately for every extra pound we spend that's a pound we have to raise in tax, and we have been able to keep corporation tax at 19% which is the lowest in the G20. We've been able to lower business rates, particularly for those businesses on High Streets. I'm sure there are many people in this room who feel that there are issues still with tax. I certainly think there is a lot of room to simplify our tax system. I think it's become over complicated. So those are some of the things we need to look at over the coming years.

The second area to highlight is infrastructure. One of the decisions this Government has made is to spend more money on capital spending, investing in infrastructure like roads; the railway network, fibre and broadband rather than day to day spending. I think that's important. But what we need to make sure is that we're spending that capital money in the right way and I'm very interested in your feedback as small businesses. What would make the most difference for your business. Is it rail connectivity? Is it fibre connectivity? Where is it geographically?

What would make the most difference to making your businesses more successful and in fact tomorrow I'm going to be in Felixstowe meeting businesses there and just hearing from the ground up about what it is that will make the difference in terms of capital investment.

Of course skills are vitally important. We've got a program of education reform taking place we're introducing new T levels. I was previously the Education Minister we introduced new GCSE and A-levels and those continue to be important.

The second area I'd highlight is improving regulation and red tape. I think the government is always in danger of creating too much red tape. I'm interested in how we can simplify that landscape and how we can make it easier for businesses to engage. How we can flag up where there are bodies which maybe not intentionally, but quite often unintentionally, might be creating those problems. I think the biggest area I'd highlight of regulation is the planning system. We need to look at cities like Tokyo which have a more liberal planning system which make it easier for office spaces to be changed, for new houses to be built and we need to look at what we can do.

One of the things we've just announced in the Budget is we're conducting a consultation on the ability to build up.

If you have a freestanding building you'll be able to build up to five stories without getting planning permission, and that is the type of innovation I think we'd need to see more of. We need to allow more spaces to be easily changed. We need to allow new land to be opened up both for housing and for office space and for manufacturing. Another subject close to my heart is childcare. Again I think there's still more we need to do on simplifying the way we organise childcare. We spend £6 billion as a government per year on supporting childcare but I think those are areas we can do better.

The final point I want to make before we go onto questions is championing new entrants. It's always tempting for government to end up listening to the big players. You can often see that it is big companies will have large lobbying organisations, big legal departments and I'm very keen as a government that we try to make sure that we're looking at how will everything we do affect new entrants. How will that affect the people that have not yet got into that market and part of that market.

This means looking at things like business support. We spend over £20 billion on business support and that's a combination of tax reliefs and other funding through things like LEP's but also through special grants for particular sectors. I want to look at this through the lens of how we help new companies start up.

And finally, I want to mention about the issue of women. We launched a report recently that showed the vast majority of all venture capital funding was going into all- male teams and I do think that that is a barrier that the government has highlighted and we want to see more venture capital firms open up and fund a wider variety of businesses, because there's no doubt that if you're well networked, if you are based in London and the Southeast or if you are male it is easier to get funding than if you're not.

We simply can't afford, as we're leaving the European Union, we're seeking to become a more competitive country. We're seeking to lead the world in enterprise. We simply cannot afford to ignore huge amounts of talent, and we can't afford to ignore half the population or cities outside London. So the Government needs to make sure that we are not skewing the playing field against new entrants and ensure that those who fund businesses are also looking beyond the usual suspects.

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## **[Press release: Fishermen urged to be Brexit ready by registering with the IMO](#)**



Under European Commission (EC) contingency proposals to enable it to grant our fishing vessels access to European Union (EU) waters in certain circumstances after Brexit, UK boats will be required to be registered with the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

While future access to fish in EU and other coastal State waters in the event of a no deal scenario remains a matter for negotiation, UK fishermen who want to prepare for all EU exit scenarios should apply for an IMO number now.

IMO registration is free and all UK fishing vessels will have to submit their IMO number to the Single Issuing Authority being established by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) – on behalf of the UK Fisheries Administrations – to manage licensing for commercial fishing in non-UK waters.

Download the IMO registration [application form](#). Fishing vessel owners should complete the form and send it to [ship.imo@ihs.com](mailto:ship.imo@ihs.com).

When fishermen have received their IMO number they should email it to [UKSIA@marinemanagement.org.uk](mailto:UKSIA@marinemanagement.org.uk) along with their Port Letter and Number (PLN) and Registry of Shipping and Seamen (RSS) number.

Fishermen whose vessels already have IMO numbers should send the details to the MMO, via [UKSIA@marinemanagement.org.uk](mailto:UKSIA@marinemanagement.org.uk), so accurate records can be maintained.

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## [Statement to parliament: Consulting on options to ban old tyres](#)

Colleagues across the House will be aware of the potential dangers posed by ageing tyres. In that context I would like to update the House further about potential changes to legislation that the government is proposing to improve the safety of buses, coaches, heavy goods vehicles and mini-buses.

This country has one of the best road safety records in the world. But over 1,700 people were killed last year on UK roads, and we are determined to improve the UK's road safety record still further. In my [written statement to the House on the 13 June 2018](#) I reported on the progress made toward the ambitious goals listed in the government's 2015 [Road Safety Statement](#).

Penalties for using mobile phones while driving have been increased and commitments for police funding to tackle drug driving have been exceeded. Learner drivers can now gain valuable experience of motorway driving when accompanied by an instructor in a car with dual controls. We are pioneering

new mobile breathalyser technologies, supporting the use of photographic and video evidence in police enforcement, and going further than ever before in investigating the causes of road collisions.

However, in recent years the safety of older tyres on heavy vehicles has become a matter of serious concern to my department, and to this House. This followed a tragic coach crash in 2012 in which 3 people from the wider Liverpool area lost their lives. Mrs Frances Molloy, whose son Michael was one of those killed, has campaigned unceasingly for a ban on the use of older tyres on buses and coaches.

She has been vigorously supported by the Honourable Member for Garston and Halewood, who has highlighted this issue in a number of Parliamentary Questions, and tabled a private member's bill on this subject on several occasions. Responding to public concerns, in 2013 my department provided guidance to all bus and coach operators on how to establish the age of the tyres on their vehicles, and against the use of tyres more than 10 years old on the steering axles of those vehicles. This was updated and extended in 2016.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency has also been monitoring compliance with the guidance on age: Since June 2017 they have inspected 136,263 buses and coaches and found 82 to be non-compliant. I am pleased to say that this represents a non-compliance rate of 0.06% – that is, less than one tenth of 1% of over a hundred thousand vehicles inspected.

But I, with the full support of the Secretary of State, have been determined to go further. In May 2018, in response to evidence that emerged from a collision investigation, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency introduced a change to roadworthiness requirements for tyres. In my written statement to this House on 23 November 2018 I announced further measures to address non-compliance with the tyre age guidance, and provide the basis for the Traffic Commissioner to intervene in cases of non-compliance.

Importantly, this guidance also covered the misuse of older tyres not only on buses and coaches, but on all heavy motor vehicles and heavy trailers.

A key constraint on this work has been the absence of robust and objective evidence as to the effect of age on tyre integrity. But we have addressed this issue too. In March 2018 I reported to the House that I had commissioned specialist research to investigate changes in the characteristics of tyres based on their age. I am pleased to tell the House that the investigative element of this pioneering work is complete, and we expect to report on the overall findings later in the spring.

Yesterday in the Coroner's court there was another awful case involving an old burst tyre which cost the lives of several people. Independent experts came together to testify that here too age was a factor. Their analysis fits with the department's own emerging body of evidence. The government now intends to [consult on options to ban older tyres on heavy vehicles](#), including legislation that could make it illegal for buses, coaches, heavy goods vehicles, and minibuses to have tyres more than 10 years old. We also intend

to extend this consultation to taxis and private hire vehicles. Subject to consultation, we would expect antique and heritage vehicles to be exempt.

I would like to pay tribute to Mrs Molloy, to the Honourable Member Garston and Halewood, and to all involved in the [Tyred campaign](#). Road safety affects us all, often in the most direct and personal and distressing way. As this legislation underlines, this government is committed to ensuring that the UK continues to have some of the safest roads in the world.

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## [News story: Market exploration: point of care diagnostics](#)

### **Summary**

On behalf of the UK MOD, the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is considering the potential for a competition to develop effective Point of Care (PoC) diagnostic devices to aid the diagnosis of individuals exposed to biological or chemical agents.

To do this we need to collect information to better understand the current market capability for the provision of PoC devices to enable earlier diagnosis and treatment of individuals exposed to a range of different biological and chemical agents. This information will provide us with the knowledge on what potential PoC diagnostic device solutions already exist, novel solutions in development and areas that potentially require further investment by MOD.

Please note that this request for information is not a commitment to subsequently launch a formal DASA competition.

### **Background**

Defence against debilitating infectious agents, including those associated with biological warfare (BW), represents a key challenge for UK Armed Forces. Throughout the history of armed conflict, Disease and Non-Battle Injury (DNBI), particularly infection, has caused significant morbidity and mortality among deployed forces.

There is a need for rapid diagnostic technologies for affected individuals and personnel involved in response and recovery work.

Technologies that enable rapid diagnosis of individuals exposed to biological or chemical agents are currently limited. They are time-consuming, resource intensive, provide a limited identification capability and frequently rely on reach back to laboratory facilities. This limits the clinical usefulness of

the results generated. PoC diagnostic devices represent an attractive solution to this problem. These may be used in austere environments by UK Armed Forces. They may also be used in a doctor's surgery or at the patient's bedside. Regardless of location it is anticipated that such devices will provide quick feedback and impact significantly on the trajectory of patient care.

There is a requirement for novel PoC diagnostic device solutions, regardless of technology readiness level, for eventual deployment by UK Armed Forces in a variety of scenarios.

## **What we want**

At present, there is a limited diagnostic capability within the theatre of operations. More complicated multiplex technologies, capable of detailed analysis of patient samples, are generally found at locations where infrastructure is good and sufficient expertise is situated to analyse and interpret complex data outputs. Simpler technologies may be found closer to the frontline; however, their output is limited in terms of sensitivity, specificity and diversity of targets.

We are interested in any PoC technologies that would enable the diagnosis of individuals exposed to a wide variety of agents, regardless of technology readiness level. These can be targeted at the agents themselves or at host biomarkers that change as a result of exposure. Our ultimate goal is to provide simple-to-use PoC diagnostic devices that are capable of complex outputs.

It is anticipated that new PoC diagnostic devices will have:

- minimal false-alarm rates
- high levels of equipment reliability
- high levels of specificity and sensitivity
- capability for the detection and identification of a broad spectrum of agents
- function in all operational conditions
- be as small as possible and deliver timely information

It is anticipated that successful platforms will be able to be exploited in both the military and clinical sectors with applications in deployed environments, primary and secondary healthcare settings.

By completing the Capability Submission Form neither DASA nor yourselves are committing to anything, but your submissions will be used to help DASA focus the direction of the work and shape the requirements for a possible themed call in this area in the future. Your submission will also help us to identify your interests in this area, and where appropriate we can introduce you to your regional DASA Innovation Partner to discuss any future activity.

## What we don't want

We are not interested in technologies that will require sophisticated infrastructure, logistical chain or need a high degree of user expertise.

We are also not interested in solutions that involve incremental or marginal improvements of existing technologies.

This is not a competition and therefore we are not asking for costed proposals at this stage. This is a market engagement request for information exercise and we do not commit to subsequently launch a formal DASA competition.

## How to submit a capability submission form

Complete the [Capability Submission Form](#) (MS Word Document, 887KB) (noting the word limits) and then email it to [accelerator@dstl.gov.uk](mailto:accelerator@dstl.gov.uk) by midday on 26 March 2019 with "Point of care diagnostics" in the subject line.

Please only provide details of one product/capability per form. If you have a number of potential solutions then please submit multiple forms.

If you have any questions then please email [accelerator@dstl.gov.uk](mailto:accelerator@dstl.gov.uk) with Point of care diagnostics in the subject line.

## How we use your information

Information you provide to us in a Capability Submission Form, that is not already available to us from other sources, will be handled in-confidence. By submitting a Capability Submission Form you are giving us permission to keep and use the information for our internal purposes, and to provide the information onwards, in-confidence, within UK Government. The Defence and Security Accelerator will not use or disclose the information for any other purpose, without first requesting permission to do so.

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## [News story: Opening Statement to CEDAW Committee](#)

Madam Chair, members of the Committee.

Thank you. As head of delegation for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I am delighted to be in Geneva for this important dialogue with the Committee, and I would like to thank the CEDAW Committee for facilitating the UK Government's participation.

I would like to re-affirm from the outset, the UK's commitment to advancing gender equality, and the important role the CEDAW Convention and your Committee play in helping us to drive forward this very important agenda. The UK Government takes its obligations under CEDAW very seriously and we come here today to actively engage in a meaningful exchange, and to benefit and learn from your collective expertise.

Madam Chair,

We all agree that the power of #MeToo – and many other emerging campaigns – that advocate for the protection of hard-won rights on gender equality, has generated a global debate.

And it remains the UK Government's ambition to use this pivotal moment to strengthen its compliance with the Convention. I therefore want to assure the Committee, that the UK Government continues to strive to meet the obligations set out in the Convention.

Madam Chair,

I would like to introduce the members of my delegation. The UK Government is responsible for equality legislation, and is accountable to CEDAW for equality across the UK. However, there are some powers that have been devolved by the UK Government to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including several that relate to equality. I am delighted therefore to share this platform today with my colleagues from the devolved administrations.

From the Scottish Government, we have Lisa Bird, Deputy Director for Equality, Human Rights and Third Sector Division, and Lesley Cunningham, Gender Equality Lead.

From the Welsh Government, we have Alyson Francis, Deputy Director of Communities, and Rhian Thompson, Equalities Legislation Manager.

And from the Northern Ireland Department for Communities, we have Carol McCabe, Head of Gender and Sexual Orientation Policy and Noel Griffin, Gender Policy Lead.

The UK Government has adopted a gender mainstreaming approach to its implementation of CEDAW. Therefore, I am also joined by colleagues from a number of central government departments here in Geneva who will address the implementation of CEDAW across all areas of government. These are:

- My policy colleagues, Charles Ramsden, Shelly Dowrich and Nengi Ayika, and legal advisors Anna Burne and Irène Solomon, from the Government Equalities Office.
- Fiona Rutherford, Deputy Director of Legal Aid Policy at the Ministry of Justice;
- Beatrice Fannon, Head of Universal Credit Managed Migration and Natural Migration Policy, and Caroline Pearce, State Pension and Fuller Working Lives Team Leader at the Department for Work and Pensions; and
- Chris Lomax, Teresa Levigne and Verity Robson from the UK Mission in Geneva. The delegation present here today will also be able to address

issues with respect to the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

I am delighted that members of civil society could join us today and commend our independent A –status national human rights institutions, who are also here today, for sponsoring so many of them to travel and participate in this important dialogue. Their passion and commitment to this agenda is inspiring.

Madam Chair,

Before I proceed to share with you our achievements and challenges in implementing CEDAW, I would like to explain the constitutional and political structures in the UK and how they ensure we live up to our obligations under CEDAW.

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of protecting human rights and liberties domestically, and of meeting our international human rights obligations in this regard. We have strong human rights protections within a comprehensive and well-established constitutional and legal system. In domestic law, rights are protected through the common law, the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the devolution statutes, as well as other legislation across the UK.

The United Kingdom's devolution settlement means that the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland take primary responsibility for observing and implementing the UK's international obligations in areas of responsibility in areas which have been devolved to them. As such, by convention, the UK Government would not normally invite the UK parliament to legislate on devolved matters without the agreement of the relevant devolved legislature. Devolution has been a positive and empowering process. It has provided more responsive structures for governing regions and countries whose people have much in common, yet who take pride in the diversity emanating from their different histories. Devolution can give rise to diverse outcomes across the UK, but we think that generally, this makes us stronger as a nation because we can learn from each other.

There is a common equality legislative framework across England, Scotland and Wales, with only certain areas being devolved, such as the specific duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Public Sector Equality Duty, is the key lever for achieving gender mainstreaming in England, Scotland and Wales, which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation when conducting their day-to-day work– in shaping policy and delivering services.

For Northern Ireland, the Belfast Agreement – itself an international agreement – was reached in 1998 and created devolution settlement in NI. It contains three strands, all of which have underpinned the peace process in NI over the last 20 years. The first of these strands is that there shall be a democratically elected Assembly in Northern Ireland capable of exercising legislative and executive competence over devolved areas of the law. These devolved areas include equalities, health and crime. The Northern Ireland Assembly, established in 1998, has been suspended since January 2017 and the absolute priority of the Government remains the restoration of devolved power

sharing government in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, while continuing to deliver vital services in Northern Ireland, the NICS is limited in its ability to make policy decisions until NI Ministers are appointed.

The UK Government does not believe that the current situation in Northern Ireland should dislodge the principle that it is for the devolved administrations to ensure human rights compliance in relation to devolved matters. Progress in Northern Ireland on some areas of the Convention will be subject to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, and therefore the UK Government view is that Northern Ireland needs its elected representatives back in Government at the earliest opportunity, with Ministers taking important decisions on a range of issues that affect the people of Northern Ireland.

Such unique circumstances underline the importance of having effective co-ordination and monitoring mechanisms in relation to CEDAW amongst other international human rights obligations. The Government Equalities Office convenes a Gender Directors' Network, which brings together those responsible for gender equality from all the nations of the United Kingdom. This forum ensures collaboration and sharing between the administrations.

The Overseas Territories are constitutionally not part of the United Kingdom and therefore, the protection and promotion of human rights is primarily the responsibility of the Overseas Territories governments.

The United Kingdom is responsible for the defence and international representation of the Crown Dependencies. The Crown Dependencies are not part of the United Kingdom but are self-governing dependencies of the Crown. This means they have their own directly elected legislative assemblies, administrative, fiscal and legal systems and their own courts of law.

Madam Chair,

In the United Kingdom, we have retained three Ministerial posts to deliver on UK Government's women and equalities agenda across Great Britain, including one at Cabinet-level – Penny Mordaunt, Minister for Women and Equalities, Victoria Atkins, Minister for Women. And Baroness Williams of Trafford, Minister for Equalities.

The Ministers for women and equalities are held to account on progress by the UK parliament.

In addition, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee was established on 3 June 2015, to monitor the performance of the Government Equalities Office, as well other equalities issues.

Since our last examination in 2013, the women and equalities brief, has been transferred to a number of different Government Departments. To provide stability moving forward, the Government Equalities Office will become part of the Cabinet Office on 1 April, sitting at the heart of government. A move that will provide continuity, help to accelerate action across government and co-ordinate a national mission, working with business, civil society,

citizens and local government, to tackle inequality.

Madam Chair,

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the areas where we believe significant strides have been taken to improve women's lives within the United Kingdom and its jurisdictions in line with CEDAW.

The UK Government, working in partnership with Territory Governments, has increased the territorial application of the Convention from three to seven Overseas Territories. This marks an important step towards the UK's fulfilment of the CEDAW Committee's 2013 recommendations. This provides over 70,000 women and girls in Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman Islands and the territorial grouping of St Helena, with increased protection from discrimination and violence.

Legislative changes in the Overseas Territories for example, Bermuda's Defence Amendment Act (2018) – which ends male conscription in the Royal Bermuda Regiment, signals a strong and active commitment to advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality. We are pleased to announce, that in view of the introduction of legislation ending male conscription, and following a formal request by the Bermudian Government, the UK will be considering removing the relevant reservation relating to Bermuda that was lodged at the time of extension of CEDAW.

This UK Government has a strong track record in promoting women's economic empowerment and as a result:

- There are close to a record number of women in work, with 71 % of women aged between 16 to 64 in employment;
- We now have the lowest ever national gender pay gap of 17.9%;
- There are also around 1.2 million women-led businesses – the highest since records began;
- We have extended the right to request flexible working to all employees;
- We have introduced shared parental leave; and
- We have improved the childcare offer.

These outcomes were achieved through a combination of innovative reforms and ground-breaking measures which will transform women's lives and provide more help for families.

In 2017, we introduced regulations requiring large employers to make public their gender pay gaps. We are proud that in the first year of reporting, over 10,000 employers reported their data. This has been the catalyst for a national conversation.

In Northern Ireland, the Employment Act requires that regulations be made and that a strategy and action plan is published on eliminating differences in pay of male and female employees.

In the 2017 Spring Budget, the government committed £5 million to support people who have taken time out of employment for caring responsibilities and want to return to paid work.

In November 2018, we announced a further £500,000 of funding to support those with additional barriers to participating in the labour market. This may include people with complex needs or multiple barriers such as substance abuse or homelessness.

In 2017, in England, we doubled the childcare entitlement for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, from 15 to 30 hours a week. The most disadvantaged 2 year olds are able to access 15 hours a week of free early education. Similar provision has been put in place in Wales and Scotland.

From August 2017, every newborn baby in Scotland receives a baby box of essential items, including clothes from newborn up to 6 months.

We want to increase women's representation in all aspects of life:

In our efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls in the UK we have:

- strengthened the law on violence against women;
- Since 2010, we have seen a 20% increase in domestic abuse prosecutions and a 28% increase in domestic abuse convictions;
- In Wales, we commenced the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, which included the appointment of a National Advisor for Violence Against Women to advise and assist Welsh Ministers;
- introduced new offences of domestic abuse, and one for failing to protect a girl from Female Genital Mutilation and forced marriage ;
- introduced lifelong anonymity for victims of forced marriage and FGM;
- created two new stalking offences;
- Introduced a new mandatory reporting duty on FGM- this has recently led to the first ever prosecution on FGM in England; and
- The Scottish Government has amended the limitation period in Scots Law to remove the 'time-bar' which prevented survivors of childhood abuse from raising civil proceedings where abuse took place more than 3 years prior.

Madam Chair,

Whilst we believe we have a good story to tell regarding our obligations under CEDAW and are very proud of our efforts to promote and protect women's rights, we are very much alive to the concerns and recommendations of this Committee and from our active civil society. We know that the UK's impending departure from the EU has raised concerns in relation to the impact of this decision on women.

The Government has made clear that the UK is preparing to leave the EU in the best possible way for the UK's national interest and is committed to ensuring the United Kingdom emerges from this period of change stronger, fairer, and more united than ever before.

The decision to leave the European Union does not change our strong commitment to recognising and respecting human rights. From the date that we

leave the European Union the UK will be free to set its own priorities, including on gender equality and women's rights. We do not need to be part of the EU to have strong protections against discrimination or high standards in the workplace. The UK has often been in the vanguard of developing new legislation and policies that support women in the workplace, tackle violence against women and girls and ensure that women are represented in political and public life.

The UK already goes beyond EU minimum standards in a number of areas, such as entitlement to annual leave, paid maternity leave and parental leave. Historically, equal pay rights for women and a ban on sex discrimination were introduced in the UK, before any EU requirements were set down. More recently regulations requiring employers to publish their gender pay gap go further than anything required by the EU or existing in any other member state.

I would like to reassure the Committee and those present here today, that the UK Government has strong safeguards in place to protect the rights of all individuals, and that will not change after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

Madam Chair,

Recently the Minister for Women and Equalities announced her ambition to ensure that every woman has as much freedom, choice, capacity, resilience, support and protection to do whatever she wants to do. This ambition will underpin the Government Equalities Office refreshed mission on gender, and its strategy on Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment that will be published in Spring.

The strategy will set out government plans to address the persistent gendered economic barriers women – and men – are facing across Britain, at every stage of their lives. In particular, it will seek to do more for low paid and financially fragile women, and women facing multiple barriers or with complex needs.

Alongside the strategy, we are creating an engagement programme, and will provide a platform for grassroots organisations and women, particularly marginalised women, to talk about what's important to them, and to discuss solutions and issues.

In Scotland, a £750,000 Workplace Equality Funding is helping to address long standing barriers faced by women, older workers, ethnic minority and disabled people, while investment of £5 million over the next 3 years will support around 2,000 women to return to work.

The underrepresentation of women in all walks of public and political life is a key priority for the UK Government. That is why in 2018, we marked the suffrage centenary with a national programme of awareness raising and celebration, and encouraging more women to participate in democracy.

Madam Chair,

A strong economy is central to tackling injustice in any society. In the 2018

Autumn Budget, the UK Government announced that we are increasing the National Living Wage to £8.21 per hour in April 2019. Over 60% of those benefiting from the introduction of the National Living Wage are women.

In November 2017, we published the Industrial Strategy, which provides the opportunity to increase ambition around women's participation in the labour market, and will help the UK address the productivity gap.

Madam Chair,

We are alive to the ongoing concerns this Committee and civil society has expressed regarding abortion in Northern Ireland. In particular, we acknowledge the findings and recommendations made by the Committee in its inquiry under the Optional Protocol into this issue.

The Government recognises that abortion is an extremely sensitive issue and that there are strongly held views on all sides.

The constitutional framework in Northern Ireland gives the Northern Ireland Assembly legislative competence in relation certain devolved matters, including health and social services, equal opportunities and justice and policing. By convention, the UK Parliament would not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters, except with consent from the devolved legislature or in cases of genuine urgency.

The Government's absolute priority remains the restoration of a devolved government, so that the people of Northern Ireland, and locally elected representatives, can decide what is right for Northern Ireland on sensitive devolved issues, including on abortion.

Ministers have been clear that it is not for Westminster to step in while this process is ongoing, but this position is being kept under review. The UK Government has already committed to providing a substantive response to the findings and recommendations contained in the Committee's report once political structures are in place to authorise and approve the response.

The Committee is reminded that in 2017 the Government put in place arrangements to support women normally resident in Northern Ireland to have access to safe abortion services in England. Separate arrangements are in place in Scotland and Wales.

Madam Chair,

We are unified in our belief that gender based violence remains a pervasive and dangerous feature of our societies, and any efforts to accelerate its elimination are welcomed.

In the United Kingdom, we have undertaken a great deal of work to tackle violence against women and girls, in all its forms including harassment and unwelcome advances that intimidate, degrade or humiliate. We have made protecting women and girls from all forms of violence, and supporting victims and survivors, a key priority.

We are committed to ensuring that victims are supported, perpetrators are brought to justice, and that we do all we can to prevent these crimes happening in the first place.

We have pledged increased funding of £100 million through to 2020 to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, including protecting funding to Rape Support Centres, two two-year funds for refuges and a new £17 million Service Transformation Fund, to promote early intervention and prevention.

In 2016, we published the most recent cross-government Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which sets out our vision for bringing these crimes out of the shadows, supporting victims, and bringing perpetrators to justice. This strategy encompasses work from across the UK Government, as well as making reference to the work that the Welsh Government is doing with devolved bodies to support this agenda.

In Scotland, Equally Safe: Scotland's national strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls was published in 2014 and refreshed in 2016. The strategy explicitly recognises violence against women and girls as a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

Domestic abuse affects almost 2 million victims every year, and the devastating consequences that it has on victims is such that it necessitates a comprehensive programme of cross-Government activity. That is why on 21 January, we published our draft Domestic Abuse Bill, a landmark piece of legislation aimed at supporting victims and their families, and pursuing offenders. This is complementary to the actions being taken in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

We believe that having a specific programme of work focussed solely on domestic abuse gives us the best chance of achieving our aims of raising awareness, and preventing abuse.

Madam Chair,

Noting your recommendations, we have reviewed our approach to women in the criminal justice system. In June 2018, we published our strategy for female offenders, which builds on the principles set out in Baroness Corston's report, and sets out our vision and plan to improve outcomes for women in the community and custody. In Scotland, plans for the future female custodial estate include a smaller national prison for women with the most complex needs. In addition, up to five new community based custodial units are planned. These custodial based units will allow women to be located as close to their communities as possible.

Madam Chair,

In these opening remarks, I hope to have given you a précis of the UK Government's commitment, and that of the devolved administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, to ending all forms of discrimination against women, and assured you of our commitment under CEDAW.

Once again, we are delighted to be here with you today and welcome the

opportunity to learn from you and discuss further with you, our progress to eliminate discrimination against women. We hold the CEDAW Committee in the highest esteem and recognise your collective world-leading authority on advancing gender equality as we commence today's proceedings.

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