

News story: Dr Patrick Vallance takes up his appointment as Government Chief Scientific Adviser

The role of the GCSA is to advise the Prime Minister and government on all matters related to science and technology and to ensure that policies and decisions are informed by the best scientific evidence and strategic long term thinking.

The GCSA is head of the Government Science and Engineering (GSE) profession and Co-chair of the independent [Council for Science and Technology](#) which provides high level advice to the Prime Minister.

Patrick Vallance said:

Harnessing the very best science and technology has never been more important to the UK's economy, future and citizens. Science and technology have a vital role to play at the heart of policy making and I look forward to working with colleagues to ensure the government has the best possible advice, from the best experts, based on the strongest evidence.

It is essential that we have world class scientists and engineers working in government. Excellence can only be delivered by a diverse and inclusive profession. It will be a key priority for me to ensure we go further to improve representation across the profession.

Before joining the Government Office for Science, Patrick Vallance was President, R&D at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) from 2012. Prior to this, he was Senior Vice President, Medicines Discovery and Development and he joined the company in May 2006 as Head of Drug Discovery.

You can find a full biography for Dr Patrick Vallance at:
www.gov.uk/government/people/patrick-vallance

Press release: Construction boss banned for moving £1m out of business

to avoid paying debts

Paul Winskill (54) started Premier Asphalt Limited in 1985 and provided construction services for commercial buildings and roadworks across the country.

But the company ran into trading difficulties and after more than 30 years, Premier Asphalt entered into administration on 19 February 2016.

The administrators appointed to close the company reported to the Insolvency Service that the directors of Premier Asphalt had not fully co-operated with them and failed to explain why the company had paid out more than £1m in the two weeks prior to their appointment.

The Insolvency Service's investigation found that prior to entering into administration, a winding up petition was served on Premier Asphalt on 3 February 2016 as a trade creditor was owed more than £300,000.

But to avoid paying his debts, Winskill immediately transferred £1,044,794 to three other businesses, which were later discovered to be operated by Winskill although he wasn't the appointed director.

On 8 February 2018, the Secretary of State accepted a disqualification undertaking from Winskill, after he admitted transferring more than £1 million to the detriment of the company's general body of creditors. His ban is effective from 1 March 2018 and lasts for eight years.

Robert Clarke, Head of Insolvent Investigations North at the Insolvency Service, said:

Following extensive enquiries, we discovered not only had Winksill transferred more than a million pounds out of the company to avoid paying his creditors what they were owed, but the money was moved to other companies which we found that he was also running.

Directors who put their own personal financial interests above those of creditors damage confidence in doing business and are corrosive to the health of the local economy. This ban should serve as a warning to other directors tempted to help themselves first, you have a duty to your creditors and if you neglect this duty you could be investigated by the Insolvency Service and lose the privilege of limited liability trading.

Premier Asphalt Limited (CR0 No. 01922245) was incorporated on 13 June 1985 and latterly traded from Hanson Road Business Park, Hanson Trading Estate, Aintree, Liverpool, L9 7JN.

Mr Winskill had been a director of the company before 13 October 1991 and remained appointed until the company went into Administration on 19 February 2016 with an estimated deficiency of £6,102,275.

On 8 February 2018, the Secretary of State accepted a Disqualification Undertaking from Mr Winskill, effective from 1 March 2018, for a period of 8 years. The matters of unfitness, which Mr Winskill did not dispute in the Disqualification Undertaking, were that:

On 04 and 05 February 2016, at a time when Premier Asphalt Ltd was insolvent, I caused the company to make payments to three associated parties totalling £1,044,794 which were to the detriment of the company's general body of creditors.

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company's property

In addition that person cannot act as an insolvency practitioner and there are many other restrictions are placed on disqualified directors by other regulations.

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Further information on director disqualifications and restrictions is available.

The Insolvency Service administers the insolvency regime, investigating all compulsory liquidations and individual insolvencies (bankruptcies) through the Official Receiver to establish why they became insolvent. It may also use powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK. In addition, the agency authorises and regulates the insolvency profession, deals with disqualification of directors in corporate failures, assesses and pays statutory entitlement to redundancy payments when an employer cannot or will not pay employees, provides banking and investment services for bankruptcy and liquidation estate funds and advises ministers and other government departments on insolvency law and practice.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 7674 6910 or 020 7596 6187

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[Speech: Marking the anniversary of the Khan Sheikhoun attack: article by Alistair Burt](#)

A year ago today, in the early hours of the morning, Syrian aircraft dropped bombs on the town of Khan Sheikhoun. The sarin released by this bombing killed approximately one hundred people, including several children. We saw media footage of men, women and children convulsing in agony, some foaming at the mouth, as their bodies were poisoned by nerve gas.

As we know, the Khan Sheikhoun attack was not the first time that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own people. In 2013, after hundreds were killed with sarin in an attack on Eastern Ghouta, Russia promised the world that Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. But this promise has not been kept. We can say with certainty, based on the findings of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, that the regime used chlorine in Idlib: at Talmenes in April 2014 as well as in Sarmin and Qmenas in March 2015. And then the massacre a year ago today in Khan Sheikhoun.

In the five years since chemical weapons were first used in the region, international attempts to halt and bring crimes such as these to account have been consistently undermined and increasingly blocked by Russia. Again and again, they have used their power of veto to defend Assad's brutal regime in the United Nations Security Council. Last November, Russia blocked the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which the Security Council had set up to ensure those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria were held accountable. Russia's response to Syria's continuing violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention has allowed these abhorrent attacks on the Syrian people to continue.

More broadly, Russia's disdain for the international system has grown ever clearer. Their brazen use of a chemical weapon on UK soil one month ago is a further case of their blatant disregard for the international rules-based system. The poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal with a military grade nerve agent endangered anyone who chanced to be in the vicinity, with more than 130 people potentially exposed to the nerve agent, including a police officer who fell into a critical condition.

Russia has offered no explanation whatsoever as to how their nerve agent came to be used in this manner. Instead, as in Syria, we have seen the outpouring of disinformation designed to confuse and paralyse the international system and prevent the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks from being held accountable. After Khan Sheikhoun, Russia repeatedly sought to undermine the OPCW – the very organisation set up to put an end to the barbarity of chemical weapons attacks. Russia unilaterally rejected the findings of the

OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism last year confirming Syrian regime use of sarin at Khan Sheikhoun. And on 22 March a senior Russian Foreign Ministry official rejected the idea that Russia would accept OPCW independent conclusions in examining the material from the Salisbury attack; only its own investigation would be acceptable.

Consensus already exists as to the abhorrent nature of chemical weapons. Only 4 states across the globe are not Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. 192 states have come together to outlaw their usage; these are weapons that have no place in the world today. We must stand together against any attempt to dismantle an integral pillar of the rules based system. This kind of destructive and dangerous behaviour threatens us all.

Events in Khan Sheikhoun and across Syria have seen the world respond in horror. We call on states worldwide to make it clear that Russia should no longer endanger its fellow states recklessly in pursuit of its aims. There should be no more victims of chemical weapons attacks, whether in the warzone of Syria or in a sleepy English town. The rules-based international order and its institutions are too valuable to be put at risk in this way: we must act collectively to protect them and ensure no-one else dies in this most horrific and inhumane way.

Further information

[Press release: International Trade Secretary Visits Thailand to Develop Trade Links](#)

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, will become the first UK trade minister to visit Thailand in 15 years when he arrives in Bangkok today to boost trade with the country.

Thailand is the second largest economy in South East Asia and bilateral trade with the UK increased by 2.8% to £5.6bn between 2015-2016. Currently the majority of UK exports are in machinery, vehicles and mechanical appliances.

Dr Fox will seek to expand this relationship, and raise the prospect of Thailand holding democratic elections, when he meets leading businesses and Thai Ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, his counterpart Sonthirat Sonthijirawong, the Thai Minister of Commerce, and Dr Pichet Durongkaverroj, Minister of Digital Economy and Society.

Thailand is implementing its “4.0 industrial strategy”, with a particular emphasis on moving towards a digital economy, from rolling out high-speed internet access for all villages to setting up a big data analytics centre.

The Secretary of State will showcase how UK's world-class digital sector can support this strategy, following a recent visit of Thai digital companies to the UK, as well as promoting the capability of UK companies in areas such as financial services, and transportation.

The Secretary of State will also showcase the capability of UK companies in areas such as financial services, and transportation, as well as raising the prospects of Thailand holding democratic elections.

While in the country Dr Fox will announce that the UK's export credit agency, UKEF, has doubled the finance available for British businesses wanting to export to Thailand to £4.5bn.

UKEF will welcome applications for support from UK companies exporting to Thailand and for Thai buyers of UK goods and services. For the first time UKEF support will now be available in Thai baht, allowing buyers in Thailand to "buy British, pay local", making exports from the UK even more competitive.

Following the lifting of the ban on British poultry, Dr Fox will also announce an export win for UK company Aviagen on the visit. Based in Stratford upon-Avon and Newbridge, the company will generate £40 million of extra exports over the next five years by exporting grandparent breeder day-old chicks and hatching eggs into the Thai market.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said:

The UK's trade with Thailand is growing steadily, but there is still huge untapped demand for British goods and services across the Thai economy, which is growing strongly and has a large middle class.

The IMF predicts 90% of global growth in the coming years will come from outside the EU, and this Government is putting the UK in a position to benefit, particularly by boosting export finance and showcasing British companies to the Asian market.

As an international economic department we will continue to use visits such as this to help businesses of all sizes forge ties and cultivate relationships with potential buyers and investors in growing markets around the world.

The Secretary of State will meet with members of The British Chamber of Commerce and Thai businesses to discuss how they can forge new links between the two countries.

Press release: UK to save 50,000 people from threat of landmines worldwide

Sudarana, a 20 year-old woman trained as demining technician by the UK charity The HALO Trust at work in a paddy field in Sri Lanka. Photo credit: Russell Watkins / DFID

The UK will help to save an extra 50,000 vulnerable people from the threat of landmines worldwide, as more children than ever die as a result of these “cruel, indiscriminate killers”, International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt announced today.

To mark International Mine Awareness Day, Ms Mordaunt warned that in far too many countries children live in fear and risk their lives every day to go to school or play with friends because years of devastating wars have left land littered with lethal, hidden mines.

According to the latest figures, 2016 saw more child casualties than ever before and the highest number of total fatalities on record for more than 15 years. More than 8,600 people were injured and more than 2,000 people were killed during the year by landmines and other explosive devices left behind by conflict.

From today, UK aid will help save the lives of 50,000 more people in South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Burma and Cambodia by clearing mines from over five million square metres of land – the equivalent of over 19,000 tennis courts – and through educating vulnerable people about the dangers of landmines, keeping entire communities safe from maiming or death.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

It is unforgivable that more innocent children than ever are being maimed or killed by landmines which have been left behind by decades of devastating wars. One wrong step on the way to school or during a game with friends can cost a life or cause a lifetime of pain and suffering.

Today we are extending UK aid support to help save an extra 50,000 people in future years by educating them about the dangers of mines and also by decontaminating land littered with the devices. This will allow the poorest people to grow crops and their children to walk to school in areas which were once off limits.

Landmines are deadly devices, that have no place in today’s world. No one should be forced to live in fear of losing a limb, their life or a child to these cruel, indiscriminate killers.

In addition to today's announcement, UK aid has:

- Cleared mines from 140 million square metres of contaminated land across the world, including in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.
- Helped eradicate landmines from Mozambique – a Commonwealth country – by clearing every deadly explosive device from roads, bridges, schools and villages, making the country completely mine-free.
- Supported The HALO Trust to hand back Afghanistan's most deadly province for landmines to its governor, after making 39 million of square metres of land safe once again.
- Matched pound for pound £214,000 of public donations to the Mine Advisory Group's (MAG's) 'Walk Without Fear' appeal – through UK Aid Match – to double the impact and help return land to almost 8,000 people in Angola, 20 years after Princess Diana walked through a landmine littered field to raise awareness of the devastating impact they have on innocent lives.
- In an event last year with HRH Prince Harry, the Department for International Development (DFID) made a £100 million commitment to make 15 million square metres of land safe again over a three year period. Today's announcement of £3 million of UK aid to South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Burma and Cambodia for a three month period is a new allocation from this existing support which will be delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid.
- The £100 million also includes:
 - £12.6 million in 2017/18 as an extension to the pre-existing contract of the Global Mine Action Programme, which is delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid in Burma, Cambodia, South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.□
 - £60.4 million for demining programmes in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Angola, Burma, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Vietnam, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.
 - £20 million for Afghanistan in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 delivered by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).□
 - £4 million for mine action in Sudan for 2018/19 and 2019/20 which will be delivered by UNMAS to clear 500,000 square metres of land in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, open 1,000 km of priority routes for

humanitarian aid delivery and provide education to 200,000 vulnerable people about the dangers of landmines.

- In addition to this, through UK Aid Match, the UK Government matched pound for pound public donations to MAG's demining appeal. DFID will be continuing its programming in Asia and Africa including Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Somalia and South Sudan.
- According to the latest statistics from the Monitor which provides research and monitoring for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), in 2016 8,605 mine casualties were recorded, of which at least 2,089 people were killed. Following a sharp increase in 2015, the casualty total in 2016 marked the highest number of annual recorded casualties in Monitor data since 1999 (9,228) and the most child casualties ever recorded (4,152).