

Press release: PM meeting with Prime Minister Ratas: 30 January 2018

She congratulated the Prime Minister on the centenary of Estonia's independence and Estonia's recent EU presidency, and they spoke about shared interests, including defence, the digital economy and Brexit.

The Prime Minister began by congratulating Prime Minister Ratas on the centenary of Estonia's independence, and noted the role of Royal Navy ships in supporting Estonia's fight for independence a century ago.

Both leaders expressed their commitment to the strong defence relationship between the UK and Estonia, and noted their shared interest in areas such as artificial intelligence and the digital economy. They agreed to look into how we might be able to collaborate further in these shared areas of interest.

The Prime Minister said that whilst the British public decided to leave the EU, they did not decide to leave Europe. She said there are many areas in which the UK and EU can continue to work together for the benefit of both parties, including counterterrorism and law enforcement.

The leaders agreed on the need for an implementation period to give businesses confidence and time to adjust to just one set of changes, and the importance of negotiating an agreement on our future relationship, which reflects the interest of both the UK and the EU.

News story: New industry group chairman appointed to help improve how large private companies are run

The government today (30 January 2018) announced that James Wates CBE has been appointed as the chair of a new industry group to lead a step change in the way large private companies are run.

As part of the government's world-leading package of corporate governance reforms, he will work with the Financial Reporting Council, the Institute of Directors, the Trades Union Congress and others to draw up the UK's first-ever set of guiding principles for large private companies.

These voluntary principles will help to ensure that our large private companies are transparent and accountable, addressing concerns that a

minority of companies are falling short of the high standards that we expect.

James Wates CBE has extensive experience in the private sector, including as chairman of one of the UK's largest family-owned construction firms, the Wates Group. He also holds leading roles advising Infastructure Exports: UK and at think-tank Tomorrow's Company which helps businesses be a force for good in society.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The UK is rightly recognised as having a world-leading business environment and responsible business practices – a key part of our Industrial Strategy.

But concerns that some companies are stepping out of line by ignoring employees' concerns need to be addressed and that is why I am delighted to appoint a chair to lead this important step change in the way large private companies are run.

James has a wealth of relevant experience and I wish him every success in his new role.

Chair of the group, James Wates CBE said:

I am delighted to have been asked to chair this very important piece of work. I feel passionately that good business, well done, can be a force for good in society.

I hope that the standards produced through this effort will help promote and enable ever-stronger and more consistent corporate governance amongst large private companies, which generate significant value for the UK economy and society.

As the part of our corporate governance reforms, the government has already:

- supported the Investment Association's world-first public register of FTSE-listed companies where more than one fifth of shareholders have opposed resolutions on executive pay packages and other issues
- asked the Financial Reporting Council to find new ways for companies to engage with their employees as part of the revised UK corporate governance code
- announced research into whether companies repurchase their own shares to artificially inflate executive pay

Yesterday, James Wates CBE chaired the first meeting of the group to develop new corporate governance principles for large private companies. The group includes the:

- Financial Reporting Council

- Institute of Directors
- Confederation of British Industry
- Institute for Family Businesses
- British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association
- Investment Association
- Institute of Business Ethics
- Trades Union Congress (TUC)
- ICSA, The Governance Institute

The government will also introduce new laws this year requiring all large companies to show their responsible business arrangements, helping to build the public's trust in big business.

These laws will apply to companies with either:

- 2,000 employees
- turnover above £200 million and a balance sheet over £2 billion

[News story: The Chief Inspector's report on Country of Origin Information has been published](#)

Mr Bolt said:

“The Home Office produces Country of Origin Information (COI) primarily to assist asylum decision makers in determining whether a person qualifies for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. COI enables them to evaluate statements made by asylum applicants and to assess their credibility. It follows that COI must be reliable and kept up-to-date.

“This inspection, which was sent to the Home Secretary on 23 October 2017, examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office functions that produce and use COI, specifically how COI products are commissioned, developed and disseminated, and how they are used within the asylum process. It did not look at the content and quality of individual products as this is the role of the [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information \(IAGCI\)](#), a panel of experts and practitioners created in 2009 to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with a rolling programme of COI reviews.

“The inspection found that the team responsible for producing COI had made efforts to engage the main users of COI, and COI products had been made shorter and topic-specific as a result. However, more needed to be done to create effective feedback loops, to understand and satisfy demand for specific COI, and to train asylum decision makers how to use COI.

“But, the inspection identified a more fundamental and urgent problem with COI. Guidance published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and recognised in the UK’s Immigration Rules requires COI to be presented in a way that permits decision makers to reach their own objective judgements and decisions on individual applications. The Home Office’s COI products do not do this.

“Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) combine country information and “Policy”. This is wrong in principle. It has the effect of directing decision makers towards a predetermined outcome, particularly where a significant body of asylum decision makers are inexperienced (as a parallel inspection of [Asylum Intake and Casework](#) found), unfamiliar with COI, have insufficient time to master every detail, and are likely to interpret “Policy” as something they are required to follow.

“My report made 7 recommendations. While the Home Office has accepted the majority, it has rejected the key recommendation regarding use of the term “policy”, suggesting in its formal response that it sees this as interchangeable with “analysis”, “guidance” or “country position”. I do not agree. The Home Office does however recognise that the term may be misinterpreted and commits to making it clear that that part of the CPIN “provides an analysis of the COI”. I look forward to seeing this clarification.

“In the meantime, I will continue to work with IAGCI to ensure that the information contained in particular COI products is as reliable, up-to-date and complete as possible, and will also ensure that any future inspections of asylum casework examine how decision makers are using COI.”

[An inspection of the Home Office’s production and use of Country of Origin Information](#)

[Home Office’s response to the Chief Inspector’s reports.](#)

Press release: Food and Drink Sector Council meets for first time

Leading figures from across the food and drink sector have formed a new partnership with government to boost productivity and make the industry more resilient, sustainable and competitive.

Meeting for the first time yesterday (Monday 29 January), the Food and Drink Sector Council agreed priorities for the next 12 months, including a focus on boosting skills, agricultural productivity, improving the nation’s nutrition and building on emerging proposals to establish a sector deal. The Council will set up expert working groups to develop recommendations for industry and

government on each of its priorities.

The new group is made up of leading industry figures from agriculture, manufacturing, retail, logistics and hospitality sectors.

The UK's food and drink industry is already a huge success story, with exports of quality British produce – worth £20 billion – reaching over 200 countries. The Council's work to boost productivity will mean industry will be better placed to take advantage of emerging global opportunities to access more markets and boost exports as we leave the European Union.

Speaking following the meeting, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

This first meeting of the Food and Drink Sector Council marks a significant step forward in supporting this vital industry, which is already worth over £110 billion to the UK economy.

This ambitious partnership between government and industry will secure the UK's position as a global leader in sustainable, affordable and high-quality food and drink. Increasing productivity will also benefit consumers and businesses, creating jobs and providing a real boost to our economy.

The Food and Drink Sector Council was first announced in the [Industrial Strategy white paper](#), which sets out the government's long-term plan to build a Britain fit for the future through a stronger, fairer economy.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

From Scotch Whisky, to award winning cheeses and premium seafood, the produce from our thriving food and drink sector is in demand and enjoyed around the world.

Through our modern Industrial Strategy and the Food and Drink Sector Council, the government is working together with industry to build on these exceptional strengths, boost its productivity and seize the future opportunities of this national success story.

Iain Ferguson, Joint Chair Food and Drink Sector Council, (Chairman Stobart Group Ltd) said:

Today has been possible due to the huge amount of work and commitment to bring the sector together. It is exciting to see everyone in the same room working together to address the opportunities and challenges we face as an industry.

Press release: Sex offender's sentence extended for repeated child abuse



Solicitor General Robert Buckland

Mohammed Waqar, who was convicted of sexually assaulting a child under the age of 13, has had his prison term increased today after Solicitor General Robert Buckland QC MP referred his original sentence to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient.

Waqar, 33, sexually assaulted the child on a number of occasions over a sustained 10 month period; he also forced the victim to watch a sexual act after showing her pornography on his phone. He showed no remorse for his actions during the trial, insisting that he was innocent.

He was sentenced in December to 2 years in prison at Bradford Crown Court. He was also given a Sexual Harm Prevention Order for 5 years and ordered to sign the sexual offenders register. The Court of Appeal agreed that his sentence was too lenient and increased it to 4 years in prison.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

“Sexual abuse is one of the most psychologically damaging things that can happen to a child. Mohammed Waqar is guilty of repeatedly and consistently abusing the victim. I’m pleased the Court of Appeal has agreed to extend his sentence.”

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