

News story: Prime Minister's 2017 Christmas message to the Falkland Islands

I am delighted to be able to send this personal message to the people of the Falkland Islands this Christmas

This year marked the 35th anniversary of the conflict to preserve your freedom and independence. So as we remember the 255 UK servicemen and three Falkland Islanders who gave their lives in defending your liberty, I want you to know that I will never allow anyone to compromise your right to self-determination – a right you freely expressed in the 2013 referendum; and a legacy for which so many paid the ultimate price.

I am equally committed to supporting your vital work to address the legacies of the conflict and to advance the broader prosperity of the Islands.

So I want to thank you and your government for your continued help in enabling the identification of Argentine soldiers killed in the conflict and buried at Darwin. I believe this shows all that is best of the Falklands – fierce in defence of self-determination but always ready to help those in distress whoever they may be. And the work done by the International Committee of the Red Cross on this sensitive humanitarian matter should, I hope, bring some peace to those Argentine families who lost their loved ones.

Building closer links with all countries in the region brings unprecedented opportunities to ensure a better, long-term and sustainable future for the Falkland Islands. I continue to believe there are non-sovereignty related areas where we can work together with Argentina for the benefit of all concerned. Whilst progress has been slower than anticipated, we will continue to work with Argentina to ensure delivery of all Joint Communiqué commitments, including the removal of restrictive measures against the Islands.

I am also pleased to see further progress to tackle another of the conflict's legacies. The current phase of demining, represents a significant increase in our demining efforts to date, backed by £20 million of additional funding. Since commencing in October 2016, work on the project has cleared over 3,200 anti-personnel mines and over 100 other items of unexploded ordnance.

The results of your latest census, and your new legislation on same-sex marriage, demonstrate a growing, diverse, and prosperous community in the Falklands today. You have an increasing international presence. Your students had their best educational results ever this year. And we will do all that we can to support your government's new economic strategy will see the start of a transformational process in the Islands'.

I also want to congratulate all your newly elected Assembly Members following

the elections last month. I was delighted to meet one of them – Teslyn Barkman – in Downing Street last month as part of my annual meeting with representatives from all the UK’s Overseas Territories.

We discussed the UK’s departure from the European Union where I reaffirmed the commitment of the government I lead to secure a deal with the European Union that is right for the whole United Kingdom and all our Overseas Territories. We also discussed the work to support the recovery effort in our Caribbean communities following the devastating hurricanes and we warmly welcomed the financial contribution from the Falkland Islands.

Finally, this last year also saw the passing of both Sir Cosmo Haskard and his wife Phillada. I know Sir Cosmo was a much admired former governor, a pioneering defender of your sovereignty and a great believer in a bright and exciting future for these very special islands. I share that belief and my message to you this Christmas is very simple: You can count on me as a UK Prime Minister who will do everything possible to support you in realising the full potential of these Islands.

With that, let me wish you and all your families a great Christmas and a very happy and prosperous 2018.

[News story: Prime Minister’s Christmas 2017 message to the Armed Forces](#)

[Watch the Prime Minister’s message to the Armed Forces.](#)

I want to send a message of thanks to every member of our armed forces and your families, wherever you are in the world this Christmas.

Earlier this year I joined the centenary commemorations for the Battle of Passchendaele.

Gathered in Flanders, we remembered the hundreds of thousands of young men who gave their lives on that battlefield in the cause of freedom.

Through a century of great change since, the high standards and devotion to duty of our armed forces have remained constant.

Today, as we face new threats, your work continues to make the world a safer place.

I saw that first hand this month in Iraq, when I met British soldiers training and supporting the Iraqi Security Forces as they fight against Daesh.

Thanks to their efforts, and the skill of the Royal Air Force, Daesh no

longer holds significant territory in Iraq or Syria and a better future is in prospect for that region.

In the Caribbean, the Royal Navy, supported by the other services brought disaster relief to those suffering in the wake of Hurricane Irma.

And twice this year, after acts of terrorism here at home, we deployed troops on the streets of the UK to help keep us safe.

Whenever you are called upon – regulars or reserves – you always give of your best and inspire us all with your service.

The enormous debt we owe to our armed forces and veterans is enshrined in the Military Covenant.

And the Covenant also recognises that your achievements are made possible by the love and support of your families.

Partners and children are often called on to make huge sacrifices of their own – from a change of school or job, to coping with extended periods of separation.

That separation is especially difficult at Christmas time, and we should all be immensely grateful for that sacrifice.

At the Passchendaele memorial service at the Menin Gate this July, those gathered sang the Ypres hymn: 'O Valiant Hearts'.

This Christmas, as people across the United Kingdom celebrate this special time of year with their families and friends we will do so secure in the knowledge that the valiant hearts of our servicemen and –women, many far away from their own loved ones at this special time of year, are working to keep us safe.

Thank you all for your service and I wish you a very happy Christmas.

[News story: International child abduction: free sources of advice and support](#)

International child abduction is when one parent takes or keeps their child outside the country in which the child usually lives, without the permission of the other parent. Many parents don't realise this could be classified as abduction and that they may be committing a criminal offence and could face a prison sentence.

If you suspect that your child may be abducted, you should contact the charity Reunite, which provides advice and information to parents and families whose children have been, or might be, abducted overseas. You can call them at any time on 01162 556 234.

You can also contact the FC0 on 020 7008 1500 at any time. Assistance the FC0 can offer includes providing information about overseas lawyers who speak English, arranging consular visits and contacting overseas courts to express interest in a case and ask about progress.

In 2016/17, the FC0 provided assistance in 449 new child custody and international parental child abduction cases and so far in 2017/18 the FC0 has dealt with 301* new cases.

Rory Stewart, FC0 Minister for Consular Policy, said:

With the school holidays coming up, it is important to highlight the impact abductions can have, especially at Christmas, when many families go abroad to visit relatives.

We assist hundreds of families going through this ordeal every year as once children are taken abroad it can be extremely difficult to secure their return.

Our consular staff in the UK and overseas are committed to giving British people high-quality, helpful and supportive assistance in these cases.

Alison Shalaby, CEO of Reunite, said:

International parental child abduction can cause great distress to a child who is removed from their home country and taken away from one parent, their extended family and friends, and everything that is familiar to them. This can cause long lasting harm to a child's wellbeing and is something that may continue to affect them well into adulthood.

Saying that, there is almost always the possibility that such cases can be resolved positively for all involved, especially the children. We would urge parents to seek help and support as through co-operation, mediation or swift court action, many children do return home and are able to continue to have a meaningful relationship with both parents.

1. More detail on FC0 support relating to child abduction is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-parental-child-abduction>
2. Reunite (<http://www.reunite.org/>) is a charity specialising in parental

child abduction and the movement of children across international borders.

3. *Data covers period from April to November 2017

[News story: Tinsel, trees and tax – 2017 in British film and TV](#)

Most people will be watching the Queen in some capacity this Christmas.

The traditional amongst us will tune in dutifully at 3pm to Her Majesty's Christmas message, full of turkey and fit to burst.

But thanks to tax reliefs in the creative sector, we can also enjoy Claire Foy's seminal performance as a young Elizabeth Windsor in the award-winning Netflix series, *The Crown*.

Tax probably isn't the first thing that springs to mind over the festive period. But when you're settling down after lunch to binge on this:

Or this:

Or even this:

It's all been made possible thanks to a government scheme, which makes it cheaper to make a TV show or film that is culturally British (or European).

Whether you're addicted to Shelby shenanigans or doctors and daleks, productions such as *Peaky Blinders* and *Dr Who* all benefit from government tax relief because they're culturally British in some way – either through their content (hello 1920s, gangster-infested Birmingham), or because of how much of it is shot in this country.

It also includes the proportion of stars and crew who are from Britain.

We're looking at you, McGregor:

And you to, Styles:

Tax and TV shows aside, pleasing everyone can be impossible, especially during the festive season, and especially after a few sherries.

But a firm favourite for the whole family has to be this year's *Paddington 2* – a perfect production for adults and children alike... and presumably with royal endorsement, after the famous bear danced a merry jig with the Duchess of Cambridge earlier this year.

So gather round the tree, don a paper hat, and raise a glass to the best of British cinema.

[News story: Major Road Network investment to boost motorists' journeys](#)

'Key 'A' roads across the country could benefit from up to £100 million each of funding as government releases [consultation on the Major Roads Network \(MRN\)](#) today (23 December 2017).

The MRN consultation proposes that 5,000 miles of 'A' road – that's over 20 times the length of the UK's longest motorway – are brought into scope for new funding from the National Roads Fund for upgrades and improvements.

Upgrade schemes which could be considered are:

- bypasses
- missing links between existing routes
- road widening
- major junction improvements
- the use of technological and safety enhancements along stretches of the network

Under the proposals in the consultation, each successful bid will be eligible for up to £100 million of government funding under the proposals and will help cut congestion, unlock housing and boost economic growth.

[A new MRN](#)

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

For decades, these major local roads have been underfunded and not properly maintained.

We are spending record amounts on improving our roads and we want more of our busiest roads to benefit from guaranteed investment.

This will unlock no end of benefits for communities by improving motorists' journeys, taking traffic away from built up areas, as well as enabling new housing to be built and creating jobs.

The [consultation on the 'A' roads which will make up the MRN and the level of funding per scheme](#) starts today and will last 12 weeks.

It is planned that a review of the MRN will mirror the planned investment in the strategic road network – motorways and large A roads managed by Highways England. This means improvements on both networks will deliver more benefits for users.

Under the proposals, road upgrades will be developed by councils and, where possible, sub-national transport bodies – a regional body which influences funding decisions such as Transport for the North – meaning they will be designed by the areas to deliver the best solutions for their roads.

From 2020 the National Roads Fund will be paid for by Vehicle Excise Duty, which raised about £6 billion last year.