

Statement to Parliament: A Statement on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy

Thank you Mr Speaker, with permission I will update the House on steps being taken to tackle harassment and abuse in Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister has made clear – there can be no place for harassment, abuse or misconduct in politics.

I said we would take action in days, not weeks and that is exactly what we have done.

Getting this right matters to everyone here – and I want to thank the Honourable Member for Birmingham Yardley – who I know is taking a keen interest in this matter.

I hope today's statement will answer some of her questions.

Last week, the Prime Minister convened a meeting of the party leaders to discuss this matter.

All party leaders attended and there was agreement to work together to make swift progress.

The proposals outlined by the Prime Minister for an independent grievance procedure have been embraced across this House, and I am reassured by the consensus.

All parties have acknowledged that any proposal must adhere to three specific criteria: it must have cross-party agreement, it must include both Houses of Parliament and it must be independent.

The new system will be available to all who work here – including all MPs' staff, Lords staff including cross-benchers, interns, volunteers, journalists, and constituency staff.

It was agreed that the political parties would establish a cross-party working group to take this work forward, and I am pleased to report that the group met for the first time on Tuesday.

The working group is made up of representatives from every party and from both Houses – Conservative, Labour, SNP, Lib Dem, Plaid Cymru, DUP, Green, and cross-benchers.

Very importantly, MAPSA, the Members and Peers Staff Association, and UNITE are representing parliamentary staff on the group, and are ensuring that their experiences, and their requirements, are taken fully into account.

The first meeting of the working group made clear that the voices of staff will be at the heart of this process. Any new system will need the absolute confidence of those who will use it.

The working group also agreed that the new procedure must be independent of the political parties – and that to inform the group over the next two weeks, we will hear from a number of different contributors.

This will include hearing from staff directly, as well as groups including ACAS, IPSA, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and experts on a range of topics that will help us to shape a new process.

Anyone wishing to submit their own thoughts or suggestions to the group in writing is also very welcome to do so.

This is early days for the working group, and we will certainly be working quickly but thoroughly to make sure we create a new procedure that provides confidence to all who use it.

I know that in addition, many members of staff have expressed an interest in the provision of HR training, as well as better employee support for staff.

All those employing staff need a certain amount of guidance and training that will enable them to be good employers.

This week the working group heard directly from the Clerks of the two Houses – who provided a very helpful account of the procedure used by House staff.

Whilst we have recognised that the Respect policy used by the House authorities provides an excellent reference point, the independent procedure we are seeking to build will take into account the specific needs of Parliament, and the group has acknowledged the need for more than just mediation.

The working group agreed a new system should provide support, advice and action on a wide spectrum of complaints around bullying and harassment.

We will do everything in our power to ensure the solution is transparent, fair, and effective.

And this fairness, Madam Deputy Speaker, must also apply to MPs and Peers, because we do recognise that right across both Houses we have many model employers who genuinely care about, and look after, their staff extremely well.

We are working to a tight timeframe – but we have all acknowledged that it is right we address this issue with urgency.

The publication of the final proposal will balance the need for fast action with the need for due diligence.

The working group, including staff representatives, are considering the timetable carefully, and aim to report back to the House before the House

rises for Christmas recess.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and the Speaker have said that you hope all parties will live up to their responsibilities by demonstrating both an appetite for change and a practical means of delivering that change.

That is exactly what we intend to do and I want to thank all parties for working together in a supportive fashion. We share this duty to bring about positive change.

People come to work in this place for a number of reasons – out of public service, to support the party of their choice, or to gain new work experience.

Nothing should deter them from pursuing those ambitions, and I know we are all determined to ensure that this is a safe and fair place to work.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Press release: Joint statement by the governments of France and the UK

Home Secretary Amber Rudd and the Minister of the Interior of France, Gérard Collomb, met in London today (Thursday 16 November). They discussed a range of home affairs matters including joint efforts to fight terrorism, illegal migration, border security and efforts to tackle serious and organised crime.

The ministers emphasised the need to maintain and strengthen bilateral cooperation on security and law enforcement co-operation. On counter-terrorism they reinforced their commitment to the British-French action plan to ensure the internet is not used as a safe space for terrorists. The ministers recognised that the internet companies are making progress, but committed to push them to go further and faster in taking down terrorist material online – in particular to ensure it is removed within one to two hours of upload – and to continue to develop technical solutions to tackle the issue.

On migration, the ministers discussed the situation in Northern France and the challenges linked to illegal migration. The ministers acknowledged the importance of UK support in reinforcing the security arrangements in coastal cities of Northern France and the need for continued efforts to manage jointly the shared border between the UK and France. The UK and France will also explore ways of improving cooperating on efforts in countries of origin and transit in Africa and Asia.

Minister Collomb also visited Brixton Police Station to see the work of the

Metropolitan Police.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd and the Minister of Interior Gérard Collomb are committed to continued close and constructive cooperation between the UK and France on these issues and to preparing together for the Franco-British Summit to be held in January 2018.

[Press release: Change of British High Commissioner to Rwanda](#)

2015 – present Windhoek, British High Commissioner 2011 – 2015 Sarajevo, Deputy Head of Mission 2009 FCO, Head, Global Response Centre 2008 FCO, Team Leader, FCO Response Centre 2006 – 2008 FCO, Internal Communication Team Leader & Leadership Conference Project Manager 2001 – 2006 Geneva, UK Mission to the UN, Second Secretary 1997 – 2000 Damascus, Third Secretary 1997 Baghdad UNSCOM, Press Officer/Special Assistant to the Director 1995 – 1997 Arabic language training 1993 – 1995 FCO, Desk Officer, United Nations Department

[Press release: Dr Liam Fox attends digital trade seminar in Geneva](#)

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox will travel to Geneva today (Thursday 16 November), home of the World Trade Organization (WTO), for a digital trade seminar.

The digital economy is playing an increasingly prominent role in global trade, and yet many of the relevant WTO rules have not been updated for 2 decades. The UK, as part of the EU, is already a leader in this area. The digital sector accounted for more than £32 billion of exports in services in 2015, a growth of almost 40% since 2010.

The seminar will explore the growing influence of digital trade on the global economy, and how best to shape and modernise global trading rules and standards to allow for the development of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data. It will also address barriers and challenges to advancing this agenda for the benefit of all WTO members.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

The principal WTO rules for the digital economy have not been

significantly updated for over 2 decades, and yet the impact of digital technology during this period has been unprecedented.

The future of global trade will be largely shaped by the digital economy, which will unlock the vast potential of trade in the services sector. As an international economic department we can help lead modernisation reforms from within the WTO, and ensure British businesses can access a wider range of markets than ever before.

The seminar will also explore how to allow more Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to access e-commerce solutions and interact with a wider network of consumers in the global market in both developed and developing countries.

Ambassadors from a broad group of WTO trading nations will attend the session, which will also consider how best to promote and protect the open, free and secure nature of the internet.

The digital economy, in particular e-commerce, is an important driver for wider economic growth and helping to ensure all countries can access the benefits will enable contribution to a truly inclusive global trading system.

Dr Fox will meet with a number of ambassadors to the WTO as he continues to promote further liberalisation of global trade, with the visit signalling a continued interest and commitment to ensuring a substantive positive outcome on digital trade at the upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires scheduled for December.

Notes to editors

World Trade Organization

The WTO was established in 1994 as an international body to regulate trade and encourage nations to agree to adhere to the principle of ever-greater trading freedom.

As a founding member, on leaving the EU the UK will need to update the terms of WTO membership where, at present, all of the country's commitments are applied through the EU as a whole. The process will mean 'technical rectification', by simply replicating current obligations, is the most simple and straightforward solution, and will cause the minimum disruption to trade.

Statistics

Information on Digital Sector exports taken from [DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2017: Employment and Trade](#)

Further information

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Press release: Government to set out proposals to reform care and support

The First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Damian Green, has announced today that the government will publish a green paper on care and support for older people by summer 2018. The paper will set out plans for how government proposes to improve care and support for older people and tackle the challenge of an ageing population.

As people are living longer and the population ages, the government recognises the need to reach a long-term, sustainable solution to providing the care older people need. As part of this work the government has begun a process of engagement in advance of the green paper to ensure it reflects a wide range of views and requirements. Government will work with independent experts, stakeholders and users to shape the long-term reforms that will be proposed in the green paper.

These proposals will build on the additional £2 billion over the next 3 years that the government has already provided to meet social care needs, reduce pressures on NHS services and stabilise the social care provider market in the short term.

First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Damian Green, said:

“An ageing population needs a long-term solution for care, but building a sustainable support system will require some big decisions. In developing the green paper, it is right that we take the time needed to debate the many complex issues and listen to the perspectives of experts and care users, to build consensus around reforms which can succeed.”

Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt said:

“We are committed to reforming social care to ensure we can guarantee everyone dignity and security in old age. It is important we consider a wide variety of views on the future of the social care system – as our ageing population continues to grow it is absolutely vital that we get this right.”

Once the green paper is published in summer 2018, it will be subject to a full public consultation.