

News story: Ministers announce Ajax delivery milestone in Wales

The ministers viewed a demonstration of the new Ares protected mobility vehicle, part of the £4.5 billion Ajax family of armoured vehicles, at the factory in Merthyr Tydfil. The platforms will now continue going through a process known as Government Acceptance Training (GAT) before they are handed over to the Army.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin, said:

I am delighted to see the Ares in action. This vehicle, and the others in the Ajax family, will give the British Army a multi-role, mounted fighting power and reconnaissance capability fit for the future. We continue to invest in the best equipment for our Armed Forces, and I'm delighted to support such strong investment in Wales

The ministers were also given a tour of the facility which was only opened in 2016, bringing around 250 jobs to the area. The MOD is the biggest provider of apprenticeships in the UK and many of those the ministers met were manufacturing and mechanical apprentices, keen to talk about their work in the factory. The Ajax build programme is also sustaining 300 jobs at General Dynamics' nearby Oakdale site.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin met with apprentices working on the Ajax programme at the factory in Merthyr Tydfil.

Backed by a rising defence budget, last year the MOD spent £870 million with Welsh businesses, helping to build a stronger economy and keep Britain safe, with Ajax representing the biggest single order for a UK armoured vehicle in 30 years. MOD investment in Wales works out to £280 per capita.

Minister for the UK Government in Wales Guto Bebb, said:

The UK Government is delivering on its ambitions for economic growth in Wales and is helping to improve people's lives. Here in Merthyr Tydfil, General Dynamics are building next generation vehicles for the Army, providing jobs and skills that drive a stronger economy for Wales and for the UK.

The six variants in the Ajax programme – Athena, Ajax, Ares, Apollo, Atlas and Argus – are due to come into service in 2020, providing a full suite of medium armoured vehicles and capabilities. The 'GAT' process for the Ares platforms is now being undertaken by the Army, conducting acceptance for both the British Army and Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S) at the facility in

Merthyr Tydfil.

The range of Ajax variants will form a key component in the Army's modernised warfighting Division conducting full-spectrum and network-enabled operations. They will operate in combined-arms and multinational situations across a wide-range of future operating environments.

The news comes after several other milestones revealed at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition last week. These included:

- The start of manned live firing trials for Ajax, including trials of the CT40 cannon, chain gun and smoke grenade launchers.
 - The award of a subcontract to Raytheon UK for power switching systems.
 - The first appearance at DSEI of digital training systems being delivered by subcontractor Lockheed Martin, including small arms handling and turret crew trainers.
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Press release: CMA lifts the lid on estate agents' cartel

This is the second time the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has taken enforcement action against estate agents in recent years, and raises concerns that the sector does not properly understand the seriousness of anti-competitive conduct and the consequences of breaking competition law.

By publishing its [findings](#) in this recent investigation, together with a [short case study](#), the CMA reveals today exactly what the agents involved did, and is also reminding others to comply with competition law and avoid being fined.

A group of estate agents – all based in the Burnham-on-Sea area in Somerset – had a meeting and agreed to fix their minimum commission rates at 1.5% with the aim of making the agents involved more money, so denying local home owners the chance of getting a better deal when selling their property.

“With a bit of talking and cooperation between us, we all win!” was their rationale.

Email evidence also explained how “the aim of the meeting...will be to drive the fee level up to 1.5%” and “...it’s really important we all give it the priority it deserves (making as much profit as possible!)”.

At the meeting they agreed to form what is known as an illegal ‘cartel’ – when two or more businesses agree not to compete with each other.

The estate agents took steps to ensure the minimum fee agreement was kept to by emailing each other when a specific issue arose, such as accusations of

“cheating” on their agreement.

Each business also took it in turn to “police” the cartel to make sure everyone was sticking to the agreement – parties were to report any issues “to the policeman immediately and get the matter resolved rather than let it fester and risk the agreement falling apart!!!!”.

Stephen Blake, Senior Director of Cartel Enforcement said:

Cartels are a form of cheating. They are typically carried out in secret to make you think you are getting a fair deal, even though the businesses involved are conspiring to keep prices high.

We are committed to tackling cartels regardless of the size of the businesses involved. We have taken action against estate agents before, and remain committed to tackling competition law issues in the sector.

James Munro, Head of the National Trading Standards Estate Agency Team, said:

We welcome the CMA’s reminder to the property sector of the importance of competition law. Being part of a cartel can have serious consequences for both businesses and individuals, so it is crucial that estate agents are aware of their competition law obligations.

As the industry regulator we use cases like this as a trigger to assess the fitness of an individual or business to engage in estate agency work. This can lead to a formal warning or lifetime ban in engaging in this work.

The CMA imposed fines totalling £370,084 on 5 of the 6 estate agents involved in this cartel. The sixth business involved was not fined as it was the first to confess its participation in the cartel under the [CMA’s leniency policy](#) and cooperated with the CMA’s investigation.

Today the CMA is highlighting its range of [simple guides](#) to help businesses understand more about competition law, and be confident they are not inadvertently breaking it. If businesses believe they have information about an existing cartel or want to know what one is the [Stop Cartels](#) webpage explains all and tells people how to report one.

Notes for editors

1. More information on this investigation including details of the CMA’s full decision can be found on the [case page](#).
2. The Competition Act 1998 prohibits agreements, practices and conduct

that may have a damaging effect on competition in the UK. The Chapter I prohibition covers anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses ('undertakings') which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK or a part of it and which may affect trade within the UK or a part of it. Any business found to have infringed the Competition Act 1998 can be fined up to 10% of its annual worldwide group turnover.

3. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law.
4. For more information on the CMA see our [homepage](#) or follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on Competition Act 1998 and civil cartels cases.
5. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or call 07774 134814.

[News story: National Reference Test 2018](#)

Today, 18 September 2017, Ofqual has announced that the next, annual National Reference Test will be held between 19 February and 2 March 2018. Our test supplier, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), is contacting about 350 schools that have been selected to take part in this year's test to make arrangements.

Commenting on the first annual test held in February and March 2017, Sally Collier, Ofqual's Chief Regulator said:

Thank you again to all the 341 schools and nearly 18,000 GCSE students who took part in the first test, earlier this year. We have completed the analysis of this year's test and we are very satisfied with the quality of the information that it has provided. Nearly all schools that had been asked to take part did so and this was a major contributor to the quality of the information we obtained. I would ask all schools that are contacted for the test in 2018 to take part. Thank you in advance for your support.

Each year a sample of GCSE students will take the same test so it will show, over time, if there is any change in how students perform at a national level. Results from the test will only be used to measure changes in performance nationally. There will be no results for individual students or schools.

We would expect to see an improvement in early National Reference Test results as student and teacher familiarity with the new English language and maths GCSEs increases. This, alongside the need to compare the performance of student cohorts over several years, means that we expect it will be 2019 at the earliest before exam boards will start to use the information from the National Reference Test when they award GCSEs.

For more information about the test, please visit the [National Reference Test document collection](#).

For more information about the National Foundation for Educational Research please visit [the NFER website](#).

Press release: PM statement: 20th anniversary of Welsh devolution

It has been 20 years since Wales made the historic decision to create its National Assembly and, in that time, we have seen some significant changes to the way in which Wales is governed.

I am pleased that my government has made an important contribution to Wales's devolution journey. We enacted the Wales Act earlier this year which delivers a new devolution settlement for Wales, further powers to the Assembly and the Welsh Government and making clearer their areas of responsibility. We have also agreed a fiscal framework with the Welsh Government that secures fair levels of funding for Wales for the longer term and paves the way for the Assembly to take responsibility for Welsh Rates of Income Tax in two years' time.

The Welsh economy has also acquired an international reputation for excellence. I took the CEO of Aston Martin to Japan with me where the company signed a £500 million deal which will help safeguard jobs in Wales and open new possibilities for future deals with Japan.

We also saw the signing of the Cardiff City Region Deal and Swansea Bay Region City Deal bringing in millions of pounds of investment and creating thousands of jobs, helping provide real opportunities for growth and prosperity in Wales.

We have also announced the abolition of Severn tolls which is a vital

investment artery into Wales which will boost the economy of South Wales by around £100 million a year.

We are now engaged in another historic mission which will see the UK leave the European Union and start the process of bringing a range of new powers back from Brussels to UK shores.

I have been clear that throughout this process we will negotiate as one United Kingdom, taking due account of the specific interests of every nation and region of the UK.□

I will continue to engage with the devolved administrations as we seek a deal that secures the specific interests of the people and governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as those of all parts of England.

Wales will always have a voice at the negotiating table.

Press release: Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Turkey

2012 – 2016 Dublin, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2011 Tehran, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2008 – 2009 Washington, Deputy Head of Mission 2006 – 2007 Colombo, High Commissioner and non-Resident High Commissioner to the Republic of Maldives 2003 – 2006 FC0, Director Europe (bilateral relations and resources) 2002 – 2003 FC0, Director of Iraq Policy Unit 1998 – 2002 Brussels, UK Permanent Representation to the EU, Counsellor for External relations 1996 – 1998 FC0, Assistant Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary 1993 – 1995 Lisbon, Head of Political section 1990 – 1992 FC0, Desk Officer for EU regional policy and Gibraltar, Europe Directorate 1988 – 1989 FC0, Head of Section, Central Africa Department 1985 – 1988 Ankara, Third then Second Secretary Chancery 1984 Full time language training (Turkish) 1982 – 1983 FC0 Assistant Desk Officer, Southern Africa Department 1982 Joined FC0