

UK government to partner with Clackmannanshire test manufacturer

- UK government signs contract with Clackmannanshire-based firm to ensure the supply of Covid-19 lateral flow tests
- Supply of tests will support government's plan to cautiously ease restrictions by helping to stop the spread of the virus
- New contracts will create hundreds of jobs across the production line and supply chain

A Clackmannanshire-based firm has secured a contract with the UK government to supply rapid lateral flow tests, which will help prevent the virus from spreading and stop outbreaks from taking hold as restrictions are carefully lifted.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has agreed contracts with Omega Diagnostics, headquartered in Alva in Clackmannanshire, and Global Access Diagnostics, based in Thurleigh, to provide manufacturing capacity for up to 200 million tests COVID-19 lateral flow antigen tests which detect positive cases quickly – in under 30 minutes – meaning positive cases can isolate immediately, breaking chains of transmission.

Around one in three people who have coronavirus do not have symptoms, so to help stop them from unknowingly passing it on, regular rapid testing is essential to find more positive cases and help stop the virus from spreading.

Lateral flow tests are helping children go back to school, keep healthcare staff safe, and making sure businesses can reopen, and including symptomatic and asymptomatic testing programmes, today the government is on track to surpass 100 million tests carried out in the UK.

The contracts are expected to create around 470 additional jobs in total, in Alva in Scotland, Thurleigh in Bedfordshire and more widely across the production line and wider UK supply chain.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This new partnership will help supply essential rapid lateral flow tests to people all over the UK – showing the pivotal role that Scottish expertise is playing in our efforts to stop the spread of the virus.

With one in three people with the virus having no symptoms, regular rapid testing allows us to identify cases we wouldn't otherwise find, preventing further transmission and saving lives.

Working together as one UK, the pandemic response has shown the strength of our Union and the power of our united efforts, and as we build back better, we will continue to champion innovation and

industry across all parts of the United Kingdom.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

It's great news that Clackmannanshire's Omega Diagnostics is to help the UK Government supply lateral flow tests for people right across the United Kingdom. This new contract will help create hundreds of high quality skilled jobs in Scotland.

These test kits are vital to help stop the virus spreading as we start to open up our economy. The UK Government continues to provide the bulk of covid testing for people in Scotland, as well as supplying vaccines for people in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Omega and Global Access Diagnostics will have the capacity to produce approximately 2 million tests per week each by the end of May, helping scale up the government's rapid lateral flow testing programme across the country.

Colin King, CEO of Omega Diagnostics Group plc, said:

We are delighted to deploy our state-of-the-art lateral flow test production facilities in support of the UK Government's COVID-19 testing programme. The collaboration with other UK based IVD companies and DHSC has facilitated the rapid development and manufacturing capability within the UK. We particularly welcome the Government's assistance to secure the specialist machinery needed to dramatically increase the scale of our manufacturing capacity which has allowed us to ensure a ready supply of high quality, reliable British made rapid lateral flow tests. Rapid lateral flow tests are an essential tool for identifying COVID-19 cases where people have no visible symptoms but could still be infectious and continue to spread the virus. We are very proud to be playing our part in the nation's effort to control the spread of Coronavirus by using our production facilities in Scotland.

Omega Diagnostics and Global Access Diagnostics are members of the UK Rapid Antigen Test Consortium, a growing coalition of industry scientists and manufacturers, who have come together to secure lateral flow tests and manufacturing capability for the UK.

Professor Chris Molloy, Chair UK Rapid Antigen Test Consortium, said:

The consortium has been harnessing the power of the UK Diagnostics industry since summer 2020 to significantly contribute to the national effort to ramp up and expand rapid regular testing programmes. We believe, these programmes, alongside vaccine roll-

out, will be key for getting people back to work, education and friends and family.

We have increased manufacturing capacity tenfold, and our member's tests continue to be validated and marketed. We have also started a digital arm comprised of digital solution providers to work with HMG and regulators on new technologies and standards moving forwards.

Numerous bilateral deals have also been agreed between members as a result of industry coming together with intense purpose and leaving competition at the door in order to prioritise the generation of new UK tests and manufacture them at a scale never considered possible.

We would like to take the time now to thank all those suppliers and manufacturers who have contributed their time and resources to this national effort. Our work here lays a strong foundation for how the diagnostics industry as a whole will flourish in the UK to improve our healthcare in the future.

[The Secretary of State has reappointed George Lucas as the Northern Ireland Member of UK Sport](#)

News story

George Lucas has been reappointed by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as the Northern Ireland Member of UK Sport from 01 February 2021 to 31 January 2025.



George Lucas has operated at Board level for over 30 years. He has held the

roles of Managing Director of Corus Steel Ireland and Chair of Steel Company of Ireland during a long and successful career in the industry. Formerly Chair of the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland, he is also a past Chair of the Ulster Branch of Tennis Ireland.

A strong believer in the lifelong benefits from participation in sport and physical activity, keen sportsman George currently plays tennis for Ireland at veterans level and has competed at 14 International Tennis Federation World Team Championships.

This role is remunerated at £218 per day. This reappointment has been made in accordance with the [Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments](#), the process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Government's Governance Code requires that any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years is declared. This is defined as holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation or candidature for election. Mr Lucas has not declared any activity.

Published 15 March 2021

[New Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration appointed](#)

Home Secretary Priti Patel has today (15 March 2021) welcomed the appointment of David Neal as the new [Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration](#).

The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration is an independent monitoring body sponsored by the [Home Office](#) that reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of the immigration, asylum, nationality and customs functions carried out by the Home Secretary, officials and others on her behalf.

Mr Neal takes up the role having formerly served as head of the Royal Military Police and Commander of the 1st Military Police Brigade.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

I congratulate David Neal on his appointment as Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration and look forward to working with him as he sets his inspection plan and makes recommendations to drive improvements across the Border, Immigration and Citizenship System.

Mr Neal will start his new role on 22 March 2021 and has been

appointed on a 3-year term following a rigorous recruitment process in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

David Neal said:

I am delighted to return to public service in such an important and high-profile role in an area which affects us all. I am honoured that the Home Secretary has appointed me as Chief Inspector, a role that is vital in monitoring and reporting on the efficiency and effectiveness of our country's border and immigration functions. I look forward to leading the team and continuing to deliver a comprehensive and high-quality inspection programme.

David Neal's appointment follows the tenure of David Bolt who steps down from the role of Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration on 21 March 2021.

David Neal was appointed by HM The Queen as the Provost Marshal (Army) and commanded the 1st Military Police Brigade from 2016 until 2019.

He led the Royal Military Police through major reforms including the Service Justice System Review, and was responsible for Operation Northmoor, the Royal Military Police investigation into allegations of illegal killings by British troops in Afghanistan.

From 2015 to 2016 he was the senior Military Police and Gendarmerie officer in NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps.

From 2012 to 2015 he was responsible for the assurance and inspection of the United Kingdom's detention facilities across the world, including in Afghanistan and on Royal Navy ships.

From 2011 to 2012 Mr Neal was an instructor and mentor at the Joint Services Command and Staff College educating and developing UK and international students from the military and civil service, in preparation for their assumption of high rank.

Mr Neal graduated from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1994 having read English Literature at Bangor University. He is a Chartered Security Professional and Chartered Manager.

[Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to](#)

Sudan: Giles Lever

Press release

Mr Giles Lever has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Sudan in succession to Mr Irfan Siddiq OBE.



Mr Giles Lever has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Sudan in succession to Mr Irfan Siddiq OBE who has transferred to another Diplomatic Service appointment. Mr Lever will take up his appointment during September 2021.

Curriculum vitae

Full name: Giles Lever

Married to: Gill Lever

Children: Two

| Year | Role |
|-----------------|---|
| 2020 to present | Full-time Language Training (Arabic) |
| 2018 to 2020 | Kabul, Deputy Head of Mission |
| 2014 to 2018 | Hanoi, Her Majesty's Ambassador |
| 2013 to 2014 | Full-time Language Training (Vietnamese) |
| 2011 to 2013 | Abuja, Deputy High Commissioner |
| 2009 to 2011 | Department for International Development, Head, Middle East and North Africa Department |
| 2009 | FCO, Strategy Development, Counter-Terrorism Department |
| 2009 | Erbil, Acting Consul General |
| 2006 to 2009 | FCO, Deputy Head, Iraq Group |
| 2002 to 2006 | Tokyo, First Secretary – Political, later Head, Political Section |
| 2000 to 2002 | Full-time Language Training (Japanese) |
| 1997 to 2000 | FCO, Head, Export Control Policy Section, Non-Proliferation Department |

Further information

All the latest news is available on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office page of the gov.uk website at: www.gov.uk/fcdo

Published 15 March 2021

[Local transport update: national bus strategy for England published](#)

Today (15 March 2021) the government has published [Bus Back Better](#), the long-term national bus strategy for England outside London.

Our strategy will deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered. [The Prime Minister's announcement of transformational funding \(a combined £5 billion for buses, cycling and walking\) in February last year](#) demonstrated the government's commitment to buses and active travel.

Following publication in June 2020 of [Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking](#), today's publication explains how buses will be transformed.

Buses are our most-used form of public transport but, even before coronavirus (COVID-19), they faced challenges. There are pockets of good bus performance outside London, but far too many places have fallen behind. Turning this around is central to this government's objectives of reaching net zero and levelling up.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on buses, as with all transport. It gives urgency to the strategy, but also an opportunity. Dealing with the emergency fostered greater cooperation between bus operators and local authorities, which we can build on. We know that wherever and whenever bus patronage grows, there are bus operators and local government working together to deliver improvements for passengers. We want this for all passengers, and the strategy sets out that we want every local transport authority and bus operator in England to be in a statutory enhanced partnership or a franchising arrangement, using existing powers in the [Bus Services Act 2017](#). We will make £25 million available straight away to develop these.

The developing partnerships will be asked to produce robust and ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans by the end of October 2021. We will expect the plans to set out a roadmap to better services for passengers and communities, urban and rural, and be fully informed by local needs.

The strategy also sets out our ambitious roadmap to a zero-emission bus fleet, including a commitment that we will [consult on ending the sale of new diesel buses](#). This will bring buses into line with other vehicles – we have already announced [ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030](#).

Disabled people rely on bus services more than most and the strategy confirms our continuing commitment to supporting an inclusive transport system. One of the strategy's aims is to improve equality of opportunity, particularly for older and disabled people. We want to see improvement plans that drive improvement in accessibility for all. Disabled people should have the confidence to travel when and where they want to, and our plans ensure that bus services play their part in making that possible.

Alongside this, we have also announced today that 17 rural and suburban communities will see an additional investment of £20 million from the government's [rural mobility fund](#) to trial innovative on-demand services that are able to get closer to where people live and at a time convenient for them – another example of the government's work to level-up transport infrastructure across the country.

I am placing a copy of the [national bus strategy](#) in the libraries of both Houses.