

UK and Egypt sign Association Agreement

The British Ambassador to Egypt, Sir Geoffrey Adams, today signed an agreement with Egypt's Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe, Badr Abdelatty to strengthen political and trade ties between the two countries.

The agreement will allow British businesses and consumers to benefit from continued preferential access to the market after the end of the transition period – which will help boost vital trade and investment.

In addition to securing trade, today's agreement provides a framework for cooperation and further development of political, economic, social and cultural links. The UK is committed to strengthening its relationship with Egypt and building co-operation on important issues including education, the environment and human rights.

The agreement will provide tariff-free trade on industrial products, as well as liberalisation of trade in agriculture, agri-foods and fisheries which will make trade easier and deliver significant savings to businesses in both the UK and Egypt.

Total trade on goods and services between the UK and Egypt was worth £3.5 billion in 2019, which we will seek to expand.

Welcoming the agreement, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

This agreement highlights the strength of the UK-Egypt partnership, and reflects our shared ambition to build our cooperation on a range of important issues.

Stronger trade links and more investment will grow our economies and help both our countries build back better from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:

This agreement is a clear signal of the UK's enduring commitment to our close bilateral relationship with Egypt and will help strengthen trade and investment ties in the future.

It will help provide both British and Egyptian businesses with new opportunities and provide them with the certainty they need to keep trading.

The UK remains committed to securing deals that support British jobs, deliver significant savings and help drive the post covid-19

recovery.

Egypt is an important market for UK exports worth £2.3 billion in 2019 (£1.5 billion in goods exports, £0.8 billion in services exports). Major goods exports to Egypt last year included metal ores (£235 million) as well as medicinal and pharmaceutical products (£111 million). Consumers and businesses will continue to benefit from more choice and lower prices on goods imported from Egypt. Major imports to the UK in 2019 included intermediate electrical goods (£193 million), and vegetables and fruit (£160 million).

General Manager at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) North Africa, Nabil Besri said:

As a large British Healthcare company in Egypt, GSK Consumer Healthcare welcomes the signature of this trade agreement between Egypt and the UK. This important agreement will undoubtedly ensure the continuity of the strong business partnership between our two countries and allow British investors to continue to benefit from a strong and healthy investment environment in Egypt.

We continue to be very optimistic about the future development opportunities in Egypt and look forward to more growth under the terms of this agreement, serving the interests of both the British & the Egyptian economies.

Anthony Pile, Chairman at Blue Skies Holdings said:

As a British business that has invested significantly in Egypt over the last 18 years, a continuation of the free trade agreement between Egypt and the UK is of critical importance to Blue Skies.

The agreement is vital to securing jobs, prosperity, sustainability and indeed driving much needed economic growth in both Egypt and the UK. Now, more than ever in the current international climate, we need the security of a seamless continuation of free trade to safeguard the future of our business.

- This Agreement is designed to take effect when the EU-Egypt Association Agreement ceases to apply to the UK.
- This Agreement will now be subject to domestic parliamentary procedures in both the UK and Egypt.
- In under two years, the UK Government has signed or agreed in principle Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with 54 countries. Total UK trade with these countries was worth £166 billion in 2019.
- A regularly updated list of all signed agreements is available on GOV.UK.
- Source of trade statistics: ONS 'UK total trade: all countries, non-seasonally adjusted April to June 2020 release'. Figures are provided on

a nominal basis.

- Source of trade in goods statistics: ONS 'UK trade: September 2020 release'.

£3.9 million to drive innovative tree planting

A cash boost of nearly £4 million to plant more trees up and down the country has been announced by the government today (5 December). This will see hundreds of thousands of new trees planted, including in towns and cities and near rivers to reduce flood risk, and help meet the government's commitment to increase planting to 30,000 hectares per year across the UK by 2025.

A pot of £2.5 million will support schemes that establish new ways of planting trees in our cities, towns and countryside. Led by Defra, Natural England and the Tree Council, this will use five pilot studies delivered on the ground by Local Authorities to develop cost-effective and innovative approaches to planting trees outside woodlands over the next two and a half years. This could include schemes such as community tree nurseries, agroforestry and hedgerow management, or planting trees from locally collected seed. These new trees will help tackle climate change and create habitats for wildlife.

A further £1.4 million has been awarded to the Environment Agency to fund 'woodlands for water' – 15 projects to plant over 850,000 trees that will protect around 160km of river and help to reduce the risk of flooding to over 500 properties.

Tree planting can play a valuable role in reducing flood risk, slowing the flow of water to nearby communities. Tree planting near watercourses can also act as a buffer for agricultural pollution and improve water quality.

The 'woodlands for water' funding, which forms part of the £640 million Nature for Climate fund to support the government's tree planting commitment, will support projects such as:

- The biosphere woods project in North Devon, which will plant 15,600 trees to improve water quality in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- 30,168 new trees in the Upper Thames and Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to help slow the flow of water and improve habitat connectivity.
- 17,687 new trees at three locations in Shropshire, helping to improve water quality, alleviate flooding, capture carbon and create wildlife habitat.
- 17,000 new trees at ten sites across Devon and Cornwall, creating and re-connecting habitats and improving water quality by reducing surface

run-off.

- 10,257 trees to be planted in the Ure and Wharfe catchments in Yorkshire to improve wildlife habitat and connectivity.

Forestry Minister, Lord Goldsmith, said:

We are going to have to break down the barriers to planting trees outside of woodlands if we are to deliver our ambitious tree planting commitments. Trees are the backbone of our urban and rural environments, and increasing planting is an effective way both to tackle climate change and stem the appalling collapse of biodiversity.

These ambitious new initiatives will help deliver tree planting on an unprecedented scale. They will help to regenerate our urban areas, as well as our watercourses and create a network of green corridors for both people and wildlife to thrive.

Sara Lom, CEO The Tree Council, said:

We are delighted to be working with local authority partners at the heart of this important project, in line with our mission to bring people together, to find creative solutions to establish more trees in our communities in a practical and sustainable way.

Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd, said:

This £1.4 million fund is one part of the wide range of measures to improve the nation's resilience to the impacts of climate change. It will accelerate efforts to reach net zero and help achieve the government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) goals for nature through effective nature-based solutions.

The projects chosen will provide invaluable benefits to communities and our environment – from reducing flood risk and protecting homes, to capturing carbon, improving water quality and encouraging biodiversity.

In addition to today's announcement, the government recently consulted on a new England Tree Strategy to accelerate tree planting and improve the management of our existing trees and woodlands.

The Prime Minister also recently announced a further [£40 million additional investment into the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund](#) – this will go towards creating and retaining thousands of jobs in the environmental sector.

The £2.5 million to fund pilots for tree planting outside of woodlands are

being taken forward as part of HM Treasury's £200 million Shared Outcomes Fund.

JETS fuels support for more than 40,000 jobseekers

In its first fifty days, Work Coaches across the country have acted quickly to deliver the additional support, signposting tens of thousands of Universal Credit and New Style Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants to the programme – providing job hunters with the boost they need to return to employment.

Targeting those made jobless by coronavirus, the support has already had early successes in finding participants roles. Jobseekers have received specialist advice on how they can move into growing sectors where jobs are available, as well as CV and interview guidance.

The tailored programme also sees those out of work for three months or longer agree an action plan with their Work Coach, receive peer support and be signposted to opportunities helping them build vital skills.

Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP said:

Many people are sadly facing unemployment due to the pandemic, for the first time in years, and will need help to build their confidence, get back on their feet and apply for new roles – JETS gives people the tools and support they need to succeed.

During such a challenging time, our new employment support is already helping thousands of jobseekers to get back into work and I've met with JETS providers to see first-hand the vital help this programme has already given people across Britain.

Our Plan for Jobs is supporting people of all ages – we're doubling the number of Work Coaches across our Jobcentres, creating thousands of opportunities for young people through our Kickstart Scheme and our SWAP scheme is helping people retrain in new industries.

JETS has taken off across the nation and is already benefitting jobseekers, including Kyran, 31, who was referred to the scheme in early November 2020.

Kyran felt the full impact of the coronavirus and, in the seven months to November, was homeless and living in a hostel. However, after finding accommodation and being referred to the JETS programme, he secured a job that suited his needs to care for his daughter.

Kyran said:

You could say I haven't made some of the best choices in life and I didn't want help because I thought I could do everything myself. I acted too proud at times. But I needed help and had to swallow that pride after being in a hostel for nearly 7 months, never knowing what would be next.

I was approached to join the JETS programme and from the moment contact was made they have helped me get on my feet. They made me feel welcome with friendly polite phone calls, not just wanting to get me into work but also wanting to know I was okay. It took a matter of days before work was already looking likely and I managed to secure a job where I would still be able to look after my daughter.

I would recommend them and, to anyone ever in my position, their number would be the first I give.

The £238 million programme is part of the government's Plan for Jobs, and follows the launch of the £2billion Kickstart scheme which will create thousands of new high quality jobs for young people, and Restart, aimed at helping those unemployed for over a year.

Further information

- Work and Health Programme (WHP) Job Entry: Targeted Support (JETS) provides employment support to Universal Credit (UC), All Work related Requirements (AWRR) and New Style Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who have been unemployed for at least 13 weeks and will launch in Scotland early next year.
- This data is derived from unpublished management information which is collected for internal departmental use only and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics publication standards.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

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Biomining study could unlock future settlements on other worlds

Experiments on the International Space Station have shown that the process of “biomining” will work in microgravity; a discovery that could help the first space settlers gather the minerals they need to build a long-term presence beyond Earth.

The BioAsteroid experiment will take up match-box sized containers carrying asteroid rock, that will then be used to grow bacteria and fungi in an incubator for three weeks to investigate how gravity affects interaction between the microbes and rock in reduced gravity. Scientists will investigate how the microbes extract materials from rocks in space.

On Earth, microbes are used in some mining as an environmentally friendly way to access metals. They digest the rock and what is left behind are the metals that miners need.

If successful, this method would support efforts to explore the Moon and Mars, allowing humans to extract building materials, water or rocket fuel. Experimenting on the International Space Station (ISS) allows scientists to conduct unique investigations on the effects of microbes on asteroidal material in conditions that can't be replicated on Earth.

Libby Jackson, Human Exploration Programme Manager at the UK Space Agency, said:

If we want to keep exploring space and pushing the boundaries of what is possible, then we will need to make or find the essential elements required to support life.

Through our membership of the European Space Agency, UK scientists are able to take advantage of the unique scientific facilities available on the ISS and are at the forefront of efforts to recreate the foundations of life on Earth.

The new Bioreactor Express programme – which this experiment forms part of – is going to change the way we are able to use this unique laboratory, opening up new opportunities for UK scientists and organisations to undertake science in space.

Scientists at the University of Edinburgh and Kayser Space, based at the Harwell space cluster in Oxfordshire, have collaborated on the project – the first European experiment to be fast-tracked through the Bioreactor Express programme, which is dedicated to biological, biotechnological and biochemistry experiments.

Prof. Charles Cockell, University of Edinburgh, said:

To sustain humans permanently beyond Earth we need to get access to useful materials. This experiment advances our ability to do that. It will also yield new fundamental insights into processes that are useful here on Earth, such as biomining and how microbes form biofilms that foul our pipes and industrial plants.

David Zolesi, Kayser Space Managing Director, added:

BioAsteroid confirms how much added value there can be in a commercial access to space and Kayser's high level of expertise in carrying out biology experiments onboard the ISS. Going from signing the contract to launch in less than 18 months was only possible by exploiting the ISS on a commercial basis.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

It's fantastic scientists at the University of Edinburgh have worked on this monumental UK-led project.

We are living during a very exciting time for the space industry. Continued UK Government investment into the space sector will cement the UK as a global leader in space.

Last week, the Chancellor committed £14.6bn in funding for R&D in the Spending Review, which means investment in Scotland's world-leading universities will continue to grow.

The experiment is due to launch to the ISS on the SpX-21, a Commercial Resupply Service mission contracted by NASA and flown by SpaceX using a Cargo Dragon 2.

The UK Space Agency funds the Bioreactor Express programme through its £374 million per year contribution to the European Space Agency (ESA). This membership enables the UK to collaborate with space agencies across the world on projects like the International Space Station.

Early next year we will see the first significant UK industrial contribution to the ISS. The ColKa communications terminal, built by MDA UK, will be installed by astronauts on a spacewalk in January.

This terminal will significantly upgrade the communications abilities in the Columbus module, where many of the UK science experiments take place as it will enable experiment data to be 'beamed' down to Earth.

Over half a million people taking part in pioneering COVID-19 research

- Over half a million people across the UK have taken part in COVID-19 research
- Participation has allowed UK-led research to deliver the world's first effective COVID-19 treatments
- 4 COVID-19 vaccine trials are currently underway across the UK due to ground-breaking participant recruitment

The UK is on the front foot of its commitment to understand how this virus spreads, and find treatments and vaccines, with the total number of British people involved in COVID-19 urgent public health research soaring from 100,000 in June to over half a million today.

Recruiting participants at unprecedented pace and scale has led to the development of life-saving treatments for COVID-19 hospitalised patients, including the recently announced findings that arthritis drug tocilizumab can be effective in treating the sickest COVID-19 patients.

The vast number of participants has meant some of the world's most promising vaccine candidates are being developed through UK-based studies, and has enabled initial results around vaccine effectiveness to be published at an unparalleled pace. It is due to rigorous clinical trials such as these that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has been able to authorise Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine for use in the UK, making the UK the first country in the western world to authorise a COVID-19 vaccine.

Three large-scale vaccine studies have been rolled out in the UK over recent months, while other promising new vaccines will be confirmed soon for delivery. Tens of thousands of people have already taken part in vaccine trials across the UK through these phase 3 trials.

Health Secretary, Matt Hancock said:

I want to thank every single person – from staff members to participants – who have taken part in this research. Everyone's involvement has provided a vital link in the chain to help us better understand this virus and I am confident we will find a resolution through the ingenuity of science.

The scale at which research into treatments for COVID-19 has taken place in the UK is unparalleled, and the determination for the country to come together to beat this virus is extraordinary.

We understand this virus infinitely more than at the start of this pandemic and each of us must continue to look at what role we can take. By coming together and using our scientific prowess, we will prevail.

The dramatic rise in enrolment over recent months is testament to the world-leading research infrastructure in the UK, as well as the willingness of people to participate in vital COVID-19 studies. Dedicated hard work from the National Institute for Health Research, the NHS and the devolved nations has ensured as many UK patients as possible benefit from the latest innovations in science and medicine.

Since March, 73 urgent public health studies into COVID-19 have been set up to investigate a range of potential treatments, vaccines and observational studies to learn more about the disease, as well as research into new diagnostic technology. NHS hospitals have played a vital role in delivering studies at pace and scale, enabling hospitalised patients to benefit from the latest COVID-19 treatments, in addition to helping tens of thousands of people gain early access to vaccine candidates through trials running across the country.

Chief Medical Officer for England and co-lead of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), Professor Chris Whitty said:

The willingness of the UK public to participate in COVID-19 research has been inspiring. Science is the only way out of this pandemic. It will find new ways to prevent and treat the virus, and this will allow us to gradually return to normal life. This science cannot happen without those who volunteer to take part in research.

The National Institute for Health Research, as part of the wider UK research infrastructure, has been key to the UK's success in delivering research with actionable findings, which have had an impact on the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the UK and around the world.

Dr William van't Hoff, Chief Executive of the NIHR Clinical Research Network, which has managed these studies for the Department of Health and Social Care, said:

Building on the fantastic progress we have made so far, coupled with the early positive results from the vaccine trials, it is vital that people continue to take part in the wide range of research the NIHR is supporting. We need more effective treatments, vaccines and better diagnostic tests to help not only people affected by this, but, critically, to also help the NHS manage this devastating infection. For that, we still need many thousands more participants to continue to volunteer for these vital studies. I encourage people to do this by visiting the [Be Part of Research website](#) or signing up to the [NHS COVID vaccine register](#).

Advancing the science around how the virus spreads across the population is vital to tackling the pandemic. Findings from observational studies, such as the [ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey](#), provide important metrics on where

infection rates are rising across the country and are shared with public health authorities and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in real time to inform policy and decision-making at the highest level.

Ensuring rapid, accurate and effective testing is widely available across the population is another key element in controlling the spread of the virus. Accurate diagnosis of infection, identification of immunity and monitoring the clinical progression of infection is of paramount importance. The government is ensuring key research within this area through the [COVID-19 National Diagnostic Research and Evaluation Platform \(CONDOR\)](#). There is a range of diagnostic and observational studies currently underway through this platform, which will pave the way to the development of advanced new testing technologies.

Sir Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of the NHS, said:

Helping so many participate in vital and urgent COVID-19 research is a phenomenal achievement by scientists and clinicians across the NHS. The speed and flexibility shown in these impressive studies now also should become the 'new normal' across the health service for wide ranging research on many other health conditions.

Today's milestone shows the remarkable national effort to tackle the pandemic. It is vital we maintain this speed of recruitment and the high uptake of participants to COVID-19 research to ensure ongoing and future studies are sufficiently powered to establish the very best vaccines that will work for as many people as possible, and to ensure we continue to find treatments for COVID-19 as quickly as possible.

The 4 vaccine trials currently underway across the UK are:

Novavax Covid Vaccine Study: 11,955 participants

A phase 3 trial of NVX-CoV2373 – a recombinant spike protein nanoparticle vaccine developed by US biotech firm, Novavax. The world's first participants to receive the vaccine through this phase 3 trial were recruited in the UK through one of the NIHR's new patient recruitment centres.

Oxford Vaccine Trial (COV002): 10,754 participants

A phase 3 trial of ChAdOx1 – an adenovirus vaccine vector. Jointly funded by NIHR and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), COV002 was one of the world's first COVID-19 vaccines to move into phase 3 trials with fast-tracked research delivery support provided by NIHR.

Imperial Vaccine Trial: 414 participants

Jointly funded by NIHR and UKRI, this is an early stage (phase 2) trial of LNP-nCoVsRNA – a self-amplifying RNA vaccine developed by Imperial College London.

Janssen Phase 3 Vaccine Study: study opened mid-November

The world's first phase 3 trial to test the safety and effectiveness of a new vaccine, developed by The Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies. The study will recruit 30,000 people worldwide.

Many more new studies, investigating some of the world's most exciting COVID-19 treatments and prophylactics to prevent disease are continually being added to the urgent public health research portfolio. These include cutting-edge studies into new monoclonal antibodies, inhaled antiviral treatments, and a range of promising potential vaccine candidates.

The [ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey](#) investigates the incidence of COVID-19 infection and prevalence of immunity to COVID-19 in the UK general population – assessed through repeated cross-sectional household surveys with additional serial sampling and longitudinal follow-up. The survey has now enrolled 297,988 participants.

Alongside the COVID-19 research, a wide and active portfolio of research into other conditions continues to be undertaken. 2,715 non-COVID studies have recruited participants since March 2020 and a further 1,000 studies are currently being set up. Over 210,000 participants have been recruited into these studies since March 2020.

It is important to note that patients can take part in more than one study – for example, in observational and interventional trials simultaneously. Therefore, the total number of participants does not equate to the same number of individual patients involved in studies. To ensure patient confidentiality, the NIHR does not keep data on individual numbers of patients.

You can take part in studies by visiting the [Be Part of Research website](#) or by [signing up to the NHS COVID vaccine register](#).