

North Macedonia and UK sign Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The Agreement strengthens the trading relationship between the UK and North Macedonia, worth £1.8bn in 2019, by securing continued preferential access and paving the way for increased trade in future.

The UK has today (3 December) signed a Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement with North Macedonia, the UK's largest trading partner in the Western Balkans.

The preferential terms secured by this Agreement will enable British business to continue to trade as they do today after the Transition Period and in turn will help protect North Macedonia's economic stability and prosperity.

The Agreement also sets out the UK and North Macedonia's ambitions for our future relationship including the strengthening of our political, economic, security and cultural ties.

FCDO Minister for the European Neighborhood and the Americas Wendy Morton said:

I welcome the signing of the UK-North Macedonia Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement which sets the foundations for an even more ambitious relationship between our countries. This includes future cooperation in tackling climate change, improving education, and standing up for human rights.

The Agreement will also strengthen our already substantial ties in trade and investment. North Macedonia is the UK's largest trading partner in the Western Balkans and the UK is North Macedonia's second largest import market. The signing of this Agreement gives exporters and consumers the certainty they need to continue trading freely and with confidence as the Transition Period ends.

International Trade Minister Ranil Jayawardena said:

Free and fair trade is vital as we work to recover from the economic impact of coronavirus, and so I am delighted that today we've secured our trading relationship with North Macedonia.

Today's agreement gives certainty for business in both countries and demonstrates our commitment to building on our strong trade ties with North Macedonia and the Western Balkans region.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to North Macedonia Rachel Galloway signed the Agreement with Minister of Foreign Affairs Bujar Osmani in Skopje.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to North Macedonia, Rachel Galloway said:

Following North Macedonia's accession to NATO, this Agreement is another positive step in strengthening UK-North Macedonia relations. North Macedonia offers great opportunities for UK companies and investors across a variety of industries and the signing of the Agreement marks a new era of increased investment in both our economies. The UK remains committed to North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic path and we will continue to stand together as NATO Allies.

The Agreement provides a framework for closer political dialogue and increased cooperation on important issues such as the environment, education, and human rights. By signing the Agreement, the UK has reaffirmed its commitment to a close relationship with North Macedonia and to playing a continued positive role in the region.

When the Agreement enters into effect at the end of the Transition Period, British businesses and consumers will continue to benefit from existing trading terms with North Macedonia, including the tariff-free trade of industrial products.

Trade between the UK and North Macedonia was worth £1.8 billion in 2019. Top UK exports to North Macedonia last year were non-ferrous metals (£1.1 billion), inorganic chemicals (£77 million) and textiles (£4 million). Meanwhile top imports to the UK from North Macedonia were metal ores & scrap (£49m), clothing (£16m) and furniture (£13 million).

Background

- Statistical sources: ONS, UK trade release (non-seasonally adjusted)
- This Agreement will now be subject to domestic parliamentary procedures in both the UK and North Macedonia.
- In under two years, the UK Government has signed or agreed in principle trade agreements with 54 countries. Total UK trade with these countries was worth £166 billion in 2019.
- This accounts for 90% of the value of trade with non-EU countries that we set out to secure agreements with at the start of the trade continuity programme.
- Source of trade statistics: UK total trade: all countries, non-seasonally adjusted April to June 2020

Who wants to be typical? Be Yourself!

The most recent event in the packed Operational Delivery Profession schedule explored career progression strategies for female leaders.

Recognising that women are under-represented in senior strategic and management roles across the Operational Delivery Profession, Power to Progress took steps to address this and provide game changing insights in a fraction of the time that it would take to experience the same. Delving into conversations around the application process, ambition and being the only female in the room, the event aimed to tackle some of the big issues.

“We are not superhuman. It is important as a leader to really bring your whole self and be honest with your team. We are not going to know everything. Being yourself takes the pressure off, and I am not afraid to ask questions.”
[Bernadette Thompson]

Rebekah Warburton (Deputy Director Universal Credit Service Planning and Delivery DWP) took up the role as host for this wholly virtual event, setting the scene, introducing our high-profile speakers and taking part in an interesting panel discussion with Angela MacDonald, (CEO and 2nd Permanent Secretary for HMRC), Bernadette Thompson (Deputy Director at MHCLG) Liza Berresford (Facilitator and General Manager Thresholds) and some very popular speakers from our recent ODP Engage virtual event, Paul Morrison (Director Strategy, Legal and Governance, FSA), Derek Thomas (Chief Operating Officer, VOA) and Shaun McNally (SRO Covid-19 Response and EU Transition, MOJ).

Angela MacDonald also gave us a fascinating insight into her career story and how she became the highest-ranking female leader in operational delivery, prompting one delegate to comment:

“Extremely inspirational, massively relatable and a HUGE relief to hear everything Angela talked about. Thank the lord for people like you, Angela MacDonald.”

Our keynote speaker, Penny Mallory wowed attendees with her amazing account of overcoming adversity to realise her dreams. Talking about personal strength, Penny draws on her experiences as a homeless teenager who fulfilled her impossible dream of becoming a Champion Rally Driver. The message that underpinned was simple but powerful. As she put it:

“It doesn’t matter what word you throw at it – grit, perseverance, resilience, passion, control, determination: mental toughness will always play a more important role than anything else in you achieving your goals.”

Penny’s session included four excellent practical tips for building mental toughness that anyone can benefit from. These, and the advice she gave really resonated with the audience, sparking a flood of comments such as:

“Thank you Penny for sharing your amazing story. I have taken on board all the suggestions and advice for building resilience and feel excited about

trying these out. Really great stuff!"

Truly inspirational.

The day ended with a powerful panel discussion, providing attendees with the opportunity for reflection and questions to be answered. The session proved extremely insightful and informative and pointed towards the huge range of resources available on the event website. Take a look at our event website to find out more [ODP Power to Progress website](#).

The day provided inspiration for all and a fascinating insight into career progression in general.

You can also recap on the event and join in the conversation on our social media pages, using the hashtag #P2P0DP on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Hampshire drug runner jailed for longer

News story

Jack Oliveira has had his sentence increased following intervention from the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.



A man who sold class A drugs and carried a double-barrelled shotgun had his sentence increased after the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, intervened and referred his sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

Jack Oliveira, 21, was part of a county lines operation to supply crack cocaine and heroin across Hampshire. The 'G' line operated across the region between May 2018 and May 2019 and was controlled by an Organised Crime Group in London.

Oliveira operated for a two-week period in November 2018. He sent messages

indicating that he sold between £1000 and £2000 of class A drugs per day during his involvement.

Oliveira was arrested in December 2018 in possession of a loaded double-barrelled shotgun and around £1000 of heroin and cocaine.

Oliveira was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment on 28 August 2020 at Winchester Crown Court. Following a referral to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General, on 3 December the sentence was found to be unduly lenient and has been increased to 6 years' imprisonment.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

Crack cocaine and heroin are dangerous substances which ruin lives. Oliveira supplied these substances on a large scale while carrying an illegal weapon and gave no thought to the consequences of his actions.

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More than one million cases reached by NHS Test and Trace

- The proportion of contacts reached by the service increases substantially from 60.5% to 72.5%
- Turnaround times also continue to improve
- Charnwood Lighthouse lab begins processing tests

NHS Test and Trace is continuing to trace a larger proportion of people who have come into contact with someone with coronavirus, latest statistics show – further helping to break chains of transmission and save lives.

Measures such as improvements to the digital self-service, which make it faster and easier to provide tracing information, as well as changes to the process for contacting under-18s in a household, have begun to show tangible improvements, with 72.5% of contacts now reached, up from 60.5% in the previous week.

The changes were made following feedback from the public and local tracing partners, and have been positively received. We expect to see the number of contacts reached continue to improve following further changes introduced last week that streamline the process, so that adults in the same family can be traced via a single phone call.

These latest developments to the service have also seen the proportion of contacts completing within 24 hours increase as the service continues to evolve.

Thanks to continued increases in capacity, turnaround times for in-person test routes continue to improve. For this reporting period, 84.9% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 79.0% reported in the previous week. 88.5% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 88.1% the previous week.

NHS Test and Trace has now reached more than one million cases (1,000,232) while in a further demonstration of a strong national and local partnership, 250 local tracing partnerships are now 'live' across the country – an increase of 50 since the previous week.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

These latest improvements once again demonstrate how NHS Test and Trace has grown from strength to strength since its launch. With the launch of the new lab at Charnwood we are striving to further increase our testing capacity. More than 41 million tests have now been processed, and with further infrastructure in development, this will continue to supplement our extensive work to improve contact tracing.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

The figures this week are a testament to the efforts made by everyone working across Test and Trace. We have been working around the clock to ensure any new developments to the service have a positive impact and this is what our numbers show this week, particularly regarding turnaround times and completion rates.

We have listened to feedback on the contact-tracing process, particularly regarding our digital self-service channels to encourage those using NHS Test and Trace to engage with us and provide information. We will not stop there, though, and work will continue to ensure NHS Test and Trace evolves and grows. Charnwood Lighthouse Lab has begun to process tests this week which will further boost our testing capacity, which has continued to increase at pace since we began.

Adding a further 50 local tracing partnerships to the capability of NHS Test and Trace is also another significant step in supporting communities across the country through outbreaks in an ever more localised way.

Professor Isabel Oliver, National Infection Service Director at Public Health England, said:

It is fantastic to see so many local tracing partnerships now underway, giving us better insights on where transmission of infection is occurring. We're incredibly grateful to everyone involved in the national and local teams across the country who are working non-stop to help us combat the spread of the virus.

These vital partnerships will help us contact as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Beating COVID-19 involves everyone working together and we hope that even more local authorities will join this vital work.

Testing

During the week of 19 to 25 November, 2,028,365 tests were processed for pillars 1 and 2.

More than 41 million tests have been conducted in total, more than any other comparable European country. With more than 700 test sites now in operation, the median distance travelled for a test has fallen again, to 2.4 miles. The new Lighthouse Lab at Charnwood began processing tests last week, and is expected to have capacity to test 50,000 samples a day by early 2021.

Testing capacity for those with COVID-19 symptoms has increased almost 5-fold in 6 months, from 100,000 a day at the end of April to more than 500,000 a day by the end of October, with plans to go even further by the end of the year.

Tracing

116,324 positive cases were transferred to contact tracers between 19 and 25 November, 84.9% of whom were reached and told to self-isolate.

Between 19 November and 25 November, 246,604 people were identified as recent close contacts, with 83.8% reached and told to self-isolate (of those who had communication details). Since Test and Trace launched, 80.1% of close contacts have been reached.

Background information

The [weekly statistics from the 26th week of NHS Test and Trace](#) show in the most recent week of operations (19 to 25 November):

- a total of 2,028,365 tests were processed for pillars 1 and 2, compared with 2,097,167 the previous week
- 98,784 (84.9%) people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 134,212 (85.7%) the previous week

- 83.8% of contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 77.9% the previous week
- 84.9% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 79.0% the previous week
- 54.2% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 50.7% the previous week
- 95.2% of satellite (care home) tests were received within 3 days after the day they were taken, compared with 91.6% the previous week

Since NHS Test and Trace launched, over 3 million contacts have been identified, and 80.1% of all contacts where communication details were given have been reached and told to self-isolate.

Latest figures also show that the [NHS COVID-19 app](#) has been downloaded more than 20 million times since it was launched.

CMA consults on Annual Plan 2021/22

News story

The CMA is consulting on its Annual Plan for 2021/22.



The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has outlined the key areas on which it expects to focus in the coming year, including its ongoing commitment to protect UK consumers during the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The draft Annual Plan also looks ahead to the end of the EU Exit Transition Period and the new responsibilities this will bring for the CMA, including an increase in merger cases and competition law enforcement, as well as the creation of new functions such as the Digital Markets Unit and the Office for the Internal Market.

The CMA proposes to focus on the following themes in 2021/22:

- protecting consumers and driving recovery during and after the coronavirus pandemic, with a particular focus on protecting the vulnerable from breaches of competition and consumer protection laws and poorly functioning markets, and supporting the UK economy by fostering competition to promote innovation, productivity and growth
- taking its place as a global competition and consumer protection authority as it assumes new responsibilities after the EU Exit Transition Period
- fostering effective competition in digital markets
- supporting the transition to a low carbon economy.

In carrying out this work, the CMA will continue to get closer to the needs of consumers, as it set out at the beginning of 2020. This includes continuing to develop its understanding of the changing needs of consumers; to explain why competition matters and the CMA's work and priorities; and to advocate more visibly and vocally for the interests of consumers.

The CMA's consultation is intended to give partners, interested parties and members of the public the opportunity to provide views and comments on the CMA's proposed Annual Plan for 2021/22, and it looks forward to receiving feedback and suggestions.

For more information on the Annual Plan and how to respond, please visit our [Annual plan consultation page](#).

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