

HMRC announces new Directors General for Borders and Trade

Jim Harra, Chief Executive and First Permanent Secretary of HMRC, has today (7 May 2020) announced that Katherine Green and Sophie Dean have been confirmed in post as Directors General for Borders and Trade, a role they have held on an interim basis since December 2019.

This appointment comes after an external competition and was approved by the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary.

The announcement comes at a crucial time as the UK prepares to leave the transition period following our departure from the EU on 31 January. HMRC has continued to play a key role during the transition period, helping to prepare for our new relationship with the EU and rest of the world after 30 December this year.

Katherine and Sophie bring a wealth of experience and relevant skills between them to the role, having previously worked at HM Treasury (HMT) covering a variety of policy and operational roles including Budget coordination, small businesses tax, financial services, private secretary to the Chancellor, and latterly as operations director and finance director on the HMT board.

Katherine and Sophie will job-share the role, adding to HMRC's efforts to create an inclusive and flexible working environment at all levels.

Sophie and Katherine said:

We're delighted to take up this opportunity on a permanent basis. We know how important it is that HMRC is ready to respond to the opportunities and challenges of our new relationship with Europe and the rest of the world after December this year.

A huge amount of work has gone into preparing for the end of the transition period, and we and our team look forward to delivering for the UK.

Jim Harra, Chief Executive and First Permanent Secretary of HMRC, said:

I'm delighted to announce the appointment of Sophie and Katherine to their roles as Directors General for Borders and Trade. As you would expect, competition was tough and the standard of candidates high, so this is a great achievement.

I look forward to their continued contribution to HMRC's Executive Committee, and to their leadership at a pivotal time for the UK and for HMRC, as we steer our way through the transition period.

Clamping down on risk of unsafe PPE

News story

How OPSS is working to ensure the right PPE goes to the right healthcare workers as quickly as possible.



One million face masks have been intercepted at East Midlands Airport, as part of a zero-tolerance approach towards unsafe PPE that will not reliably protect those working at the frontline of the coronavirus crisis.

The Government is working hard to ensure the right PPE goes to the right healthcare workers as quickly as possible; whilst using intelligence-based intervention to keep products that will not protect out of the marketplace.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), within BEIS, examined an estimated one million face masks in a batch of consignments at East Midlands airport.

OPSS detained 700,000 suspect face masks, based on assessments of their quality, marking, certification and documentation. Masks and other items that could be shown to be safe were released for immediate use, including by businesses working at the frontline such as care homes.

OPSS is coordinating intelligence across the UK's ports and borders and has deployed an enforcement team to East Midlands Airport in response to information from Border Force.

OPSS Chief Executive Graham Russell said:

We are committed to supporting legitimate businesses who are working hard to increase the supply of PPE to health and social care settings. But anyone setting out to supply unsafe PPE, with fake certification and false safety marks, needs to know we take a zero-tolerance approach.

We will use all necessary enforcement powers to make sure unsafe PPE does not enter the supply chain and will take action against importers who set out to flout important safety rules.

OPSS has seen a rise in intelligence relating to PPE products including sales of non-compliant or counterfeit face masks and hand sanitisers, being sold online, in shops and at markets.

300,000 items from the consignment have been cleared by OPSS personnel, actively protecting health workers against the pandemic. Unsafe PPE that cannot be re-worked or used safely in another setting will be quarantined or destroyed.

In notes

- OPSS has been working closely at East Midlands Airport with the Health and Safety Executive, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and Leicestershire Trading Standards
- OPSS put in place two regulatory easement routes from 26 March, which maintain essential safety requirements, but streamline administrative processes to speed up supply of PPE to the NHS and other essential workers.
- For Government purchases for the NHS, PPE can be supplied without CE marking or conformity assessment, provided it meets essential safety requirements and is cleared by the Health and Safety Executive.
- As a result, manufacturers going through the approval process for sale or donation to the NHS can have new PPE approved in weeks rather than the months or years it can take under the normal system. In one example, a leading company (Apple) has gained regulatory approval for a new face mask with support from OPSS officials in just 10 days.
- Authorities in the Netherlands recalled 600,000 defective face masks manufactured in China.

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[Guidance published for Small-Scale Manufacturers of COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment](#)

News story

How OPSS is responding to support small businesses and individuals wanting to manufacture personal protective equipment (PPE) that will protect against COVID-19.



The Office for Product Safety and Standards has [published guidance](#) designed to help any small businesses, organisations or other individuals who are responding to the call for a national effort to produce personal protective equipment (PPE) aimed at protecting the health of the wearer during the COVID-19 outbreak.

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[DVLA: encouraging the IT experts of tomorrow](#)

The UK needs 100,000 new graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects every year. But currently only 6% of the workforce in STEM related subjects are female. [Research conducted by the Welsh government](#) has shown that a staggering 93% of parents would not support their daughter to pursue a career in a STEM subject. But, when asked at school, 39% of girls said they enjoy Information Technology, Computing and Design Technology.

Employing around 5,000 people in Swansea, DVLA was one of the first government departments to bring its IT function 'in house' and has one of the largest self-sufficient IT departments in government. This puts us in a perfect position to share our knowledge and expertise with the up-and-coming generations, to try and encourage a culture change that will get more women into IT roles.

Bring your daughter to work

We've recently introduced a 'bring your daughter to work' day. Here we aim to close the gender gap in IT by inviting staff to bring their daughters to work in a bid to spark interest from girls to consider a career in IT.



We want to encourage girls, who often give up on IT once they join secondary school, to keep going with STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and add them to their choices for exams as they go through secondary school.

DVLA's chief technology officer Brian Sullivan said:

"We're well aware that there are more men than women working in the IT sector and this is just one of the ways in which we are trying to change that here in Swansea.

"If we can encourage more girls to take an interest from an early age, in 10 years we will have more local women qualified and ready for a career in IT. It would be great to see them working here at DVLA."

Other initiatives

'Bring your daughter to work' is just one of our initiatives in this space. We also run events where all children aged 11 to 13 are invited to spend the day at DVLA and try some fun coding activities, learn about new technologies and pick up some new skills along the way.

All content is age appropriate, light and interactive where possible. At the end of the day there's a topical, fun quiz based on the learning gained from the day, with prizes too – always a hit with the children.

Some feedback we've had from the children, teachers and parents:

"It was really good and a lot more interesting than I thought it would be."

"I thought we were going to be sat at computers and that it would be a bit boring, but it's been really fun. The activities were very good."

"Good presentation. Activities were fun and pitched at the right level. The children were engaged throughout."

"In the future these skills will be used back at school for coding tasks."

"I think it was a great experience & should be rolled out for all schools."

"Must have listened well as she told me about it after the day!"

This feedback is a good indicator that we were able to inspire participants to want to continue their learning journey. It certainly meets with our vision of investing in digital skills.

What's coming next

Capability and Talent Development Lead, Karen Clark said, "Our aim is to ensure that as an agency, we continue to support and grow the digital skills of young people in the local region and this is a brilliant opportunity to inspire the next generation.

Along with promoting the learning of STEM subjects, this is a great way for us to position DVLA as a leading digital and technology employer and a great place to work for future generations."

You can [read about what it's like to work at DVLA](#) and [take a look at our latest vacancies on Civil Service jobs](#).

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Leaving lockdown together: Why we are better united against coronavirus

This week we commemorate VE Day. It was a moment of profound national relief, tinged with the reality of the sacrifices made in reaching that point. As this week proves, even after 75 years we remember vividly what that long period of attrition and grief taught us.

And so the current coronavirus pandemic reminds us of what matters in times like this, and what we can achieve as a United Kingdom.

Because if there is one thing that these crises have shown us throughout our shared history, it's that the nations of the United Kingdom are at their strongest when they work together.

Politics is a profession that thrives on disagreement and debate so I pinch myself as I agree with Nick Thomas-Symonds, the Labour MP for Torfaen and the new Shadow Home Secretary, when he said that the UK Government had worked well with the devolved administrations during this emergency. His comments reflected the appeal I hear daily from businesses and residents across Wales – park our political differences and unite in the defeat of this unwelcome and invisible killer, COVID 19.

Here in the United Kingdom, the pandemic response has been marked by joint decision-making and collaboration between the UK Government and the devolved administrations.

This is the approach that a crisis dictates, and it is the level of grown-up politics that the public demands. This does not preclude challenge, disagreement and analysis. That is important, but for now it is a question of timing and effort, all of which is focussed on a common objective.

Sometimes there have been differences of approach in the different nations as our administrations reacted in real time to the incredible challenges faced every day. We all accept there will be some 'divergence' – that's the reality of devolved government. But it has been striking that despite the very different political make-up of the administrations across the UK, the similarities in approach taken have by far outnumbered the differences.

It may not be reported widely, but almost every day I speak to Welsh Government Ministers, and what we call the 'machinery of Government' – civil servants, advisers and officials – are in near constant discussion. And guess what? More often than not we agree on this very point.

Whether it's the protection of jobs and livelihoods, the vast UK wide welfare system, the UK armed forces support that is so visible up and down Wales or the world class UK wide research and development – the importance of the Union (including the presence of the UK Government in Wales) has never been so crucial to the lives of the people of Wales. And rather than pose a threat

to devolution and a sense of intense national pride, it actually empowers them.

So, as the First Minister Mark Drakeford himself has pointed out, all four nations entered lockdown restrictions at the same time and should, if at all possible make any modifications to the restrictions at the same time. This is because our economy and systems are so intertwined.

We agree that a UK-wide transport system that permits one thing in Bristol but demands another in Newport is doomed to failure. How would we explain to our bigger employers that the rules in Deeside are different from their plant in Doncaster, especially if staff members work between the two?

People across Wales have been magnificent in the weeks since March when social distancing measures began. The overwhelming majority have followed the guidelines, stayed indoors and have more than done their bit to slow the spread of the virus and protect the NHS.

This is because the guidance has been simple, and the approach from both governments has been united. It is why Welsh business has quietly risen to the challenge, making PPE, sanitiser or developing new ventilator technology. They have donated food and time, supported key workers and looked after the workforce.

This is the approach that we need to sustain in the weeks ahead.

Covid-19 will undoubtedly be with us for some time yet and until we have met the five tests set out to beat this virus, we must continue with the measures we have been taking to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. Later this week the Prime Minister will give an update on the measures and decisions we will need to take next to safeguard the economy and avoid the risk of a second peak that would be so damaging.

It is a UK wide approach in this next phase which will be the best for the people and businesses in Wales. We entered this fight as a United Kingdom and we will come out of it even more united.

ENDS.

Note:

This article was published in English in the Western Mail on Thursday, 7 May. A Welsh translation of the article will be made available shortly.