

## Maarat Al Numan: Foreign Secretary statement



The Assad regime has now captured Maarat Al Numan in Idlib. Since April, the Russian and regime offensive has killed more than 1,500 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands.

The UK has repeated its calls for a political settlement and an immediate cessation of hostilities in Idlib at the UN Security Council this week.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

This vicious campaign of attrition continues to force civilians to flee by targeting their schools, hospitals and emergency first responders. The UK condemns the repeated flouting of International Humanitarian Law. Only a political settlement in line with Security Council Resolution 2254 can deliver a lasting peace for Syria.

### **Further information**

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## Professor Andrew Wathey CBE appointed interim Chair of the Student Loans Company

The Department for Education has today confirmed that Professor Andrew Wathey has been appointed as the Chair of the Student Loans Company (SLC), on an interim basis, with effect from 1 February. Professor Wathey replaces

Christian Brodie, who served as Chair for six years from January 2014.

Professor Wathey is Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria University, prior to this he was Senior Vice-Principal at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has comprehensive experience of the UK's education sector having held a number of senior appointments. Professor Wathey has been a Non-Executive Board member at the SLC since 2018 and was Chair of the SLC Stakeholder Forum between 2010 and 2017.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore MP said: "I am pleased to welcome Professor Andrew Wathey as the new interim Chair of the Student Loans Company. I am confident his experience and knowledge of the higher education sector will be invaluable to the SLC and the important service it provides to students and graduates.

"I would also like to thank Christian for his leadership and dedication during a period of significant growth and development for the organisation."

Professor Wathey said: "Every year the Student Loans Company enables almost 2 million students to invest in their futures through higher and further education by providing trusted, transparent, and accessible student finance services.

"I am delighted to take the reins of this important organisation, and to provide stewardship for an interim period. I would like to pay tribute to the significant work of Christian in leading the Board and the Executive Leadership Team to provide the critical service over the last six years, while achieving significant improvements and growth in the range of products offered."

Paula Sussex, SLC Chief Executive said: "I look forward to working closely with Professor Wathey as we strive to fulfil our vision to be widely recognised as enabling student opportunity and delivering an outstanding customer experience in the efficient delivery of the four UK governments' higher and further education finance policies."

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## [Awards open to recognise best practice in making regulation work](#)

The Regulatory Excellence Awards, organised by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), share best practice in regulatory delivery by recognising work that has achieved positive outcomes.

The categories remain unchanged from last year: Primary Authority, Better Business for All, Innovation and Technical, and Product Safety.

From engineers, scientists and technicians working in metrology and testing to individuals in businesses, trade associations and frontline regulators using better regulation tools and principles, the aim is to showcase outstanding work being done to protect the public and help British business comply with regulation.

There are four categories open to individuals, and organisations of any size, whose work is relevant to operations in the UK.

In the Primary Authority and Better Business for All categories, judges will seek a single Winner, and award Highly Commended and Commended where appropriate.

- Primary Authority – open to anyone involved in the development and management of primary authority partnerships.
- Better Business for All (BBfA) – open to BBfA partnerships, organisations and individuals working in the BBfA programme.

In the Product Safety and Innovation and Technical categories, judges will seek outstanding work, and will take into account the resources available, the difficulty of the challenge and the impact of the work. They will also award Highly Commended and Commended where appropriate.

- Product Safety – open to individuals or teams in business or regulatory organisations who have made a significant contribution to product safety, excluding automotive, pharmaceutical and construction products.
- Innovation and Technical – open to anyone working in technical and scientific fields (including metrology and hallmarking) who have developed novel or technical solutions that have in some way contributed to protecting consumers and supporting business.

Entry is simple, via a 500-word statement which demonstrates how the individual or organisation has made a real difference in protecting citizens and supporting the business community, using better regulation tools and principles.

Follow #RegEx2020 on Twitter and help spread the word.

- The Awards are open to anyone involved in the delivery of regulation and compliance e.g. local authorities, national regulators, businesses and trade associations
- Individuals, teams or organisations can be nominated by others and/or themselves
- Entry forms are available from [Regulatory Excellence Awards 2020 Entry Form](#) (ODT, 29.4KB) or from [OPSSRegExAwards@beis.gov.uk](mailto:OPSSRegExAwards@beis.gov.uk)
- Deadline: entry forms must be returned to the Office for Product Safety and Standards by May 1, 2020

- Entries must be submitted online. Scanned entries are acceptable.
- Short external endorsements may be included with entries.
- *No* additional material is required, and *will not* be considered by the judges.

Entrants may receive a follow-up call from a member of the OPSS team. Judging and the announcement of finalists will take place in May.

Winners will not be notified in advance.

Winners be announced at a special half-day event at the offices of Gowling WLG in London on June 4, where we will hear from regulators and businesses, and have time for networking and refreshments.

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## [Commission finds trustees dubbed 'UK's most prosecuted landlords' may have exploited their charitable status for financial gain](#)

The Charity Commission has found the trustees of Alternative Housing responsible for misconduct and/or mismanagement, on the conclusion of an [inquiry into the charity](#) published today. The charity has been removed from the register.

The charity's objects were to provide accommodation, support and care to those in need within Bristol.

The Commission opened an inquiry into the charity in July 2017 following the charity's conviction in November 2016 for six breaches of the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006, which led to the charity being branded the 'most prosecuted landlords in the UK' by news articles.

The charity's services and accommodation provided to residents were reported in news articles at the time to include issues such as no heating, no water, broken cookers and overflowing raw sewage.

In convicting the charity, amongst other problems identified, the court determined the charity had failed to maintain firefighting equipment and fire alarms, failed to ensure the internal structure of the property was maintained and failed to ensure that the water supply and drainage system serving one property was kept in good, clean and working condition.

On opening the inquiry, the Commission found the charity looked like it had ceased to operate. The only person recorded as a trustee on the register at the time told the inquiry he had never been a trustee. None of the other trustees provided any information to the inquiry.

The charity failed to file accounts in accordance with charity law over several years. An order on the charity's bank account meant the Commission was able to determine that the charity reported their income as falling beneath the threshold of £25,000 for filing accounts with the Commission when, over several years, it had substantially exceeded this.

The inquiry also found there were links between trustees of the charity and the directors of companies the charity had paid significant charitable funds to, but the inquiry found no evidence to suggest apparent conflicts of interest, had been declared or managed appropriately. For example, one signatory on the charity's bank account was the sole director of a company that received £232,000 from the charity and owned a property, occupied by a relation, who was a former trustee of the charity.

The local authority told the inquiry it had serious concerns over the validity of the housing benefit being requested by the charity on behalf of tenants occupying the properties it managed. It therefore found the charity was not fit to receive housing benefit and stopped making payments.

The inquiry determined that the trustees had failed to ensure the charity could deliver suitable accommodation to its beneficiaries and the condition of the properties had placed people who needed support at significant risk of harm. This is mismanagement and/or misconduct by the trustees.

Charities exist to do good and ensuring beneficiaries are safe should be an absolute governance priority for all trustees. The trustees of Alternative Housing failed in this responsibility.

Instead, there are indications the trustees may have exploited their charitable status for financial gain – by paying significant funds to the companies connected to people at the charity whilst exposing beneficiaries to harm, and by failing to ensure the accommodation the charity managed was maintained. Alternative Housing has now been removed from the register.

The full report of the inquiry is available on [GOV.UK](#).

**Ends**

**Notes to editors:**

1. The Commission has [previously considered](#) charities that provide support and accommodation to individuals and continues to assess the issues and wider risks for charities in this area.
2. Registered charities with a gross income in the financial year exceeding £25,000 [must file their accounts](#) and an annual report with the

Commission.

3. The Commission does not investigate criminal matters or matters of social care and health provision or the adequacy of housing; these are for the police and other agencies.
4. The Commission's role is to investigate the trustees' compliance with charity law and their duties as trustees.
5. The charity was removed from the register on 8 October 2018 as it was found to no longer be operating.

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## Space science investment generates income and creates jobs

The study found that £523 million of UK Space Agency funding put into the European Space Agency's Space Science Programme (SSP) has generated £1.4 billion of income for UK industry, with a further £1.1 billion from partially attributed and forecast benefits.

The investment, between 2000-2018, created 306 jobs. The UK industry regularly secures major ESA contracts to provide mission spacecraft platforms, support mission operations and develop major subsystems.

To support UK involvement in the build and data exploitation of the science instruments themselves, the UK Space Agency provides separate funding to the academic community.

One of the missions addressed by the report, Solar Orbiter, is due to launch in February. This will take the most detailed images ever of the Sun and provide crucial information about how our star's volatile activity affects its atmosphere. This knowledge will help improve predictions of space weather events, which can disrupt and damage satellites.

The UK is at the heart of this ESA mission, with Airbus at Stevenage winning the contract to design and build the spacecraft. This could become the template for an operational programme to monitor and warn us of approaching Space Weather. Meanwhile Imperial College London and UCL Mullard Space Science Laboratory are leading international teams to design and build two instruments while the Science and Technology Facilities Council's RAL Space and UCL are major contributors to two more and from which future operational requirements will be defined.

Chris Lee, Chief Scientist at the UK Space Agency, said:

Having a major role in space science programmes is like playing in the Champions League. Technology doesn't get much harder than this and the insights these missions offer and the skills they create

permeate the entire UK space economy – supporting our leading role in areas such as telecommunications, Earth observation and weather satellites.

The report, commissioned by the UK Space Agency, also found the UK's investments in space science have led to the development of new skills in the sector and improved facilities, such as clean rooms, computing and mechanical equipment.

In November the UK Space Agency joined all ESA member states in supporting a 10% rise to the overall space science budget, taking the UK's share to around £600 million over a five-year period. This will increase the number and ambition of space science missions, including missions to use gravitational waves to study black holes and to intercept and study a pristine comet in our solar system.

SSP is designed to undertake scientific research concerning the solar system, our Sun and the Universe beyond. At the same time, the programme is charged with stimulating competitive industrial capability.

In addition to these direct industrial contractual benefits, UK investment aims to facilitate technology transfer, industrial-academic knowledge transfer, and contribute to the UK skills base by attracting and developing young talented scientists and engineers through high profile missions.

The evaluation focused on a sub-set of seven SSP missions: Bepi-Colombo, Gaia, Herschel, James Webb Space Telescope, Lisa Pathfinder, Planck and Solar Orbiter.