

[Press release: Minister for the Middle East meets with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister](#)



Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt met his Iranian counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, in London yesterday for talks on bilateral issues, including the Iran nuclear deal and cases of British dual nationals detained in Iran. During the meetings, held at the Foreign Office, the Ministers also discussed Iran's role in the Middle East.

Speaking following the meetings, Minister Burt said:

Continuing constructive engagement with Iran is vital on issues ranging from the preservation of the Iran nuclear deal to the ongoing detention of British dual nationals in Iran. The Foreign Secretary had useful meetings on these areas when he visited Tehran in December last year, and it was good to have an opportunity to build on this with some positive discussions in London today.

Iran is, in addition, a pivotal actor in the wider Middle East. In my meetings I urged the Iranian Government to play a more positive role in the region, particularly in the conflicts in Yemen and Syria.

Published 22 February 2018

[News story: New members announced for](#)

Ofqual board

The new board members are Ian Bauckham CBE, Dr Jo Saxton, Major General Rob Nitsch CBE, Delroy Beverley and Lesley Davies OBE.

Ian Bauckham will take up his position on 1 March 2018 and the other new appointees will take up their positions on 1 April 2018, replacing existing board members Anne Heal, Barnaby Lenon, Tom Taylor, and Terri Scott all of whom are at the end of their terms.

Roger Taylor, Chair of Ofqual said:

I am delighted to welcome Delroy, Ian, Jo, Lesley and Robert to the Ofqual Board. The diversity of their experience and combined knowledge will greatly benefit Ofqual in its important work in ensuring qualifications in England are of the highest standard.

I would also like to publicly thank Anne, Barnaby, Terri and Tom for their valuable contributions to Ofqual's Board over many years ahead of their departure in March.

Below is some further information on the board members:

Ian Bauckham CBE

Chief Executive Officer of Tenax Schools Trust, multi-academy trust (MAT) which includes Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, a large comprehensive in Kent. Mr Bauckham was previously President of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and has sat on Ofqual's Standards Advisory Group since 2015.

Dr Jo Saxton

Chief Executive of Turner Schools, a multi-academy Trust (MAT), working to overcome coastal disadvantage in Kent, with schools that promise success without selection. Prior to founding Turner Schools, Dr Saxton served as Chief Executive of Future Academies, the MAT chaired by previous education Minister Lord Nash. Dr Saxton is also a trustee of The Brilliant Club.

Major General Rob Nitsch CBE

British Army Personnel Director and a member of the Army Board. A chartered engineer with significant leadership, HR and logistics experience, Major General Nitsch is accountable for the Army's core education programme and its apprenticeship schemes, on which over 15,000 personnel are enrolled. He has held a number of training appointments in his military career and is currently the Army's Engineering Champion.

Delroy Beverley

Former Chairman of the International Advisory Board at Bradford University School of Management, and was the first Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Chairman of an International Business School in Europe. Mr Beverley is also a former Regional Chairman of the National Apprenticeship Board and served on the Apprenticeship Delivery Board. Currently, he is Executive Director of Nottingham City Homes, and is also Chairman, North East, Yorkshire & Humberside Region of Chartered Management Institute.

Lesley Davies OBE

Principal at one of Greater Manchester's leading educational providers, Trafford College. Previously, Ms Davies was Senior Vice President at Pearson UK. Prior to joining Pearson, she worked for the Association of Colleges where she was Deputy Chief Executive. Ms Davies background is in teaching and assessment in vocational qualifications, inspection and policy development. Ms Davies is currently the Chair of the UK Skills Partnership Group and Chair of the Trafford Youth Trust.

Ofqual's Board is chaired by Roger Taylor and also includes Professor Mike Cresswell, Hywel Jones, Christine Ryan, Frances Wadsworth and David Wakefield.

Further information

The appointments were conducted and agreed in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) and were made on merit.

In accordance with the original Nolan recommendations and the code of practice, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if any declared) and other information, to be made public.

The details of the application process and job description were published online and the essential criteria were:

- The ability to think strategically and to contribute to strategic development in different contexts;
- High level management and/or board experience in the public, voluntary or private sectors; and
- The ability to build effective relationships at high levels and/or between organisations.

The desirable criteria were:

- Experience of the education sector, particularly, secondary, further and/or higher education;
- Senior level practical or academic experience of vocational and technical qualifications;
- Deep assessment expertise;
- A background in industry with knowledge of apprenticeships;

- Experience of senior positions in HR, training and recruitment;
- Experience of senior corporate positions in communications or logistics; and
- An understanding of regulation in general and/or the regulatory framework within which Ofqual operates.

The roles are remunerated at £6,000 per annum, based on up to 20 days' work.

Speech: PM's Chinese New Year speech

Good evening everyone, welcome to Downing Street, and a very happy Chinese New Year to each of you.

It's an honour to have you here this evening to celebrate not just the start of the Year of the Dog, but also the deepening links between the UK and China.

As many of you know, I have recently returned from an important trip to China, strengthening the Golden Era of relations between our countries.

I had the privilege of visiting three wonderful cities: Wuhan, and Beijing, and Shanghai.

I had fruitful discussions with President Xi and Premier Li.

And I saw first-hand the growing strength of the trade and investment relationship between our two countries.

And I was delighted to take a 50-strong business delegation with me, and I think the visit helped to secure more than £9 billion of commercial deals that will benefit people here at home and in China. Those deals will create 2,600 jobs in the UK.

But the ties that bind our two countries are about more than just business.

They're also about people. The 150,000 Chinese students currently studying in the UK. The growing number of young British people studying or working in China.

The hundreds of thousands of tourists who travel between our countries each year.

And of course the thriving Chinese community in the UK, who do so much to make the UK the country it is today.

Confucius wrote that "Virtue is not left to stand alone – he who practises it will have neighbours."

I think it's a powerful message for all of us seeking inspiration for the year ahead. And it exemplifies the contribution made by so many Chinese people in this country.

I'm thinking in particular of people like James Wong from Birmingham.

James chairs the committee that runs one of the UK's largest Chinese New Year festivals, bringing tens of thousands of people together every year.

And he's also an absolute pillar of his local community, combatting loneliness by bringing elderly people together to enjoy free meals in the restaurant that he runs.

And last year James was officially voted "Brummie of the Year", which speaks volumes about the face of modern Britain and the contribution and integration of the UK's Chinese community.

And in January James also received a 'Points of Light' award to recognise his work.

And he's here with us today to help celebrate. Many congratulations James!

Now, when I was in China President Xi, quoting Shakespeare, said of UK/China relations that "What's past is prologue". And I, like him, am committed to building on the progress of recent years to deepen our relationship yet further.

For many years, many people have worked hard to bring the UK and China closer together – indeed, many of them are here with us tonight, including the Chinese ambassador.

The result of their work is the Golden Era we are living through today.

And, when I look around this room, when I see the passion, commitment and enthusiasm of so many people, I know for sure that the next 12 months will be another auspicious year for our businesses, for our governments, and above all for our peoples.

Have a very happy and prosperous new year.

Xin Nian Kuai Le.

Speech: Midlands Engine Investment Fund

Thanks, Nick, it's a pleasure to be here.

In the very heart of the Midlands Engine.

And a nearly a year on from the launch of our [Midlands Engine Strategy](#).

We've achieved great things over the last 12 months, including:

- announcing a new East Midlands Manufacturing Zone pilot
- agreeing a second devolution deal with the West Midlands Combined Authority
- launching an ambitious [Industrial Strategy](#) – with opportunities for the region to boost productivity and skills

But there's much more to come.

We're committed to making the Midlands a powerful engine for economic growth.

When we say we'll build an economy that works for everyone; we mean it.

But, to just step back a bit, if you can put your money into anything, anywhere in the world – why would you invest in the UK today?

Why the Midlands?

Well, we all know that Midlanders are very grounded people.

It's where Sir Isaac Newton discovered gravity after all.

And very sensible.

It's where John Cadbury invented my favourite chocolate.

And if there's anywhere that shows that something small can be mighty.

It's the Midlands.

Where the Mini Cooper was invented.

Where Tolkien dreamed up the hobbits.

Where 27,000 Midlands business – many of which are small enterprises – exported £47.5 million of goods globally.

It's an exciting time for the Midlands Engine.

In December, Coventry was awarded UK City of Culture 2021.

And Birmingham announced as the hosts of the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Derbyshire, too, is set to showcase the marvels of Midlands' manufacturing at a new museum where it all started...

...on the site of the world's first ever factory.

We want to harness its huge potential and help give small firms across the Midlands that much needed boost to grow their business.

To generate jobs to benefit the whole Midlands and, ultimately, the British economy.

Which continues to confound the pessimists.

With growth forecasts for 2018 and 2019 upgraded to 1.9%.

More people in work than ever before.

And interest rates remaining low.

Giving British businesses a great opportunity to grow – and those who invest in them, a great return.

Investing in the UK, and The Midlands Engine, is a no-brainer.

Because the 'heart of England' is just that – the lifeblood powering this country's prosperity...

...not to mention innovation, culture and even cuisine.

And I'm not just saying that because I'm a proud Midlands' MP. It's the land of Shakespeare and the steam engine.

Charles Darwin and Rolls Royce.

Newton and Nightingale.

Wedgwood and Walkers Crisps.

And, of course, that most English of dishes – the balti!

Yet, too often these strengths go unsung and are overshadowed by our preoccupation with the North / South divide.

But it's Birmingham – where we are today – not somewhere in the North or the South – that is England's second city.

And it's the Midlands' regional economy that's worth more than £230 billion – larger than countries such as Denmark.

An economy that boasts over 14% of the UK's high-growth businesses.

That's underpinned by a prime central location – within easy reach of London and the UK's Northern heartlands.

And by excellent transport links.

A road and rail network that connects the Midlands with the rest of the country...

...with the new HS2 route set to cut journey times dramatically.

As well as 2 international airports that connect the region to Europe and the

world.

Then there are its many universities, with their cutting-edge research and teaching excellence.

And with people under 20 making up a quarter of the region's population, its young, dynamic workforce.

So the economic case for the Midlands is clear.

Which brings us to the [Midlands Engine Investment Fund](#).

Why this fund and why now?

Because it's not just the small businesses in line for funding who'll benefit.

The growth and the jobs they generate, as a result, will benefit the entire Midlands – and, ultimately, the British economy.

So we all have an interest in supporting them and seeing them succeed.

And ensuring that every single part of the UK can play to its strengths and spread prosperity ...

...something which is absolutely central to our Industrial Strategy and creating a country that works for everyone.

The Midlands Engine Investment Fund is doing just that...

...which is why, as the Midlands Engine Ministerial Champion, I'm proud to give it the government's full backing.

As you know, the fund is the result of investment and collaboration involving many players...

- my department and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- the British Business Bank
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)
- the West Midlands Mayor and business leaders
- and also European funding

And I want to thank everyone involved – many of you who are here today...

...who have helped forge these strong partnerships at a national and local level.

We can see these efforts starting to pay off...

...with the first companies to receive small business loans and debt finance under phase one of the fund already reaping the rewards.

These include Direct Digital Controls, in the West Midlands.

A business that specialises in installing and maintaining energy and environmental control systems.

Thanks to investment from the fund, it's expanding. It's now set to take on four new employees and train an additional apprentice.

There's Olberon, a medical devices company, based in Nottingham.

Finance from the fund will have a huge impact on its international commercial sales...

...by allowing the firm to develop existing links with distributors and market its products more effectively.

And also BCME, owner of specialist education provider – Echo Factor – in Leicester...

...which will use the fund's support to maximise student numbers and become more self-sustaining.

And, Renewable ON Ltd, a clean energy lighting specialist, from Milton Keynes.

The loan funds it has received will go towards cash flow including stock, wages and marketing to fulfil initial orders.

Many of these sorts of small companies struggle to access the financial support they need from mainstream lenders...

...because they don't meet conventional criteria on security or risk.

The Midlands Engine Investment Funding ensures that they will finally get this help...

...and be able to grow, generate jobs and realise their untapped potential.

But, as I said earlier, these ripples of prosperity will spread far beyond those who receive the funding.

And we can already see evidence of this, with an increased buzz around business start-ups...

...stronger SME growth and improving business confidence.

All of which are fuelling a greater demand for external finance.

And I expect this momentum to build following today's launch of the Fund's remaining equity and proof of concept funds.

Funds that will back the Midlands' most innovative small companies – start-ups, scale-ups and everything in between – to succeed.

That will support them to work with our top universities.

That will help them develop and test pioneering technologies, processes and products and bring them to market.

And provide venture capital to realise the ambitions of our high-growth companies.

Having spent 19 years in finance – including in private equity and investments...

...I know, first-hand, what a difference this investment in ground-breaking ideas and technology will make.

Putting the Midlands on track to create the world-class companies of the future.

So, with over £250 million now available – and these funds being matched pound for pound by investment from the private sector...

...there's a huge prize at stake.

A boost for around 1,500 SMEs across the Midlands.

An estimated 3,800 jobs created as a result.

And, vitally, a return that will be ploughed back into the region to drive growth in years to come. I know that these companies' ambitions – and those of the Midlands' business sector, as a whole – know no bounds.

And neither do ours.

Which is why Sir John and I undertook a trade mission to China last November to promote closer business links with the Midlands Engine.

This was a great success, with 18 Midlands' companies from a variety of sectors taking part.

And lots of interest and enthusiasm generated among Chinese businesses and potential investors...

...some of whom are in active discussions about future trade and investment prospects in the Midlands.

We're now looking to follow this up with a Midlands Engine trade mission to India later this year.

I know that you're thinking...

...but this is not a showdown between whether Birmingham or Mumbai does the best curries!

There can only be one winner in that contest – clearly those that my mum makes!

We're going all out to spread the word overseas about the Midlands Engine

and the endless opportunities it offers.

Because the Midlands...

...it's dynamic businesses and talented, hard-working people...

...are, without doubt, up there with the best in the world.

With an illustrious past that few countries can match, never mind regions.

And, with the [Midlands Engine Investment Fund](#) delivering more jobs, growth and productivity...

...an even more exciting future ahead.

Press release: Less than a quarter of charity auditors complied with new reporting rules, according to review

Fewer than one in four auditors alerted the charity regulator to matters of material significance identified in their charity audit reports, [according to a new review](#). The Charity Commission has found that, of the 114 auditors who gave audit opinions containing information they were required to report to the regulator in the six months to October 2017, only 28 contacted the Commission.

The Commission says it is now working with the accountancy profession to raise auditors' awareness of requirements and address this under-reporting, which it describes as raising a 'significant concern' about the adequacy of reporting to the Commission by auditors.

The regulator undertook the review to test compliance with [rules that came into force from May 2017](#), extending the list of reportable matters to include modified audit opinions, such as paragraphs about an emphasis of matter or a material uncertainty regarding going concern – meaning there are doubts as to the charity's ability to remain solvent.

The new rules are designed to help the regulator intervene in a more timely way, notably where charities face financial difficulty putting their future at risk. They follow the [Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into the collapse of Kids Company](#), which recommended clearer guidance to auditors on the issues regulators expected them to report.

Of the 28 auditors who made a required report to the Commission, only 6 did so promptly, or within one day of signing the audit opinion; 3 waited more

than two months to alert the Commission.

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, says:

Auditors provide vital reassurance that a charity's accounts are true and fair and by extension in helping ensure charities are transparent and the Commission can regulate effectively. So it is very important that accountancy professionals understand the requirements on them in auditing charities' accounts.

This review shows that, at this time, too few auditors are complying with their statutory duty to report matters of material significance to us as soon as they identify them. This potentially puts charities at risk. It is important that we identified and responded to this quickly and so we are working with the accountancy profession to help raise awareness of auditors' reporting requirements and ensure they meet them.

A [review published last year](#) analysed the reasons auditors gave modified audit opinions in 2016; these included concerns, on the part of the auditor, that charities did not have sufficient evidence to support their stated income or expenditure.

The Commission has been liaising with both the [Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales \(ICAEW\)](#) and [ACCA, the global body for Professional Accountants](#), about the findings from the report.

ACCA has welcomed the report, saying that "there is a responsibility on the profession to uphold the highest of standards" and that it would work with the regulator to "ensure the value of audit and all reporting for the charity sector remains a top priority".

Independent examiners were not included in this review, as the revised directions and guidance that referred to their duty to report matters of material significance to the UK regulators, only took effect from 1 December 2017. The regulators published [updated guidance for independent examiners](#) in September 2017.

Ends