

Press release: ARQUEÓLOGO DEL SMITHSONIAN RICHARD COOKE RECIBE HONORES

En la tarde del día jueves 25 de enero, Richard Cooke, científico del Instituto Smithsonian de Investigaciones Tropicales en Panamá, recibió oficialmente la Excelentísima Orden del Imperio Británico en la Residencia del Embajador del Reino Unido.

Este Honor es otorgado por S.M. la Reina dos veces al año en el marco de la celebración de su cumpleaños, y el Año Nuevo. Fue originalmente establecido en 1917 por el Rey Jorge V.

Los recipientes de La Excelentísima Orden del Imperio Británico (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire o M.B.E, por sus siglas en Inglés) son galardonados por sus contribuciones a las artes y las ciencias, contribuciones de caridad y el servicio público, fuera del servicio civil.

Cooke fue nominado a esta promoción por amigos y estudiantes británicos del Reino Unido, quienes reconocieron el impacto de sus contribuciones a lo largo de los años.

El premio fue anunciado por "The Gazette" – la publicación oficial del Reino Unido – en junio de 2017. La nota detalla que el Arqueólogo Cooke fue condecorado debido a sus "servicios a la arqueología y la intelección de la antigua Civilización de América Central."

Durante la ceremonia, amigos y colegas de Cooke expresaron la magnitud del impacto de sus investigaciones al legado panameño por casi 50 años.

Acerca de Cooke:

Cooke nació en Guildford, Inglaterra en 1946. En 1968 obtuvo su licenciatura en Arqueología y Lenguas Modernas en la Universidad de Bristol. En octubre de 1969 llegó al país para trabajar en lo que resultó en su doctorado de la Universidad de Londres en 1972.

Los principales intereses de investigación de Cooke son: la historia de la pesca en aguas tropicales, la arqueología y la paleo ecología del puente terrestre centroamericano, además de la arqueo-zoología.

Sus trabajos y los de sus colegas nos brindan datos arqueológicos y de la genética humana, la lingüística y la ecología que nos muestra claramente que durante los 15,000 años del período precolombino, había sociedades humanas viviendo en tierras nacionales.

Ha brindado muchas oportunidades profesionales tanto a arqueólogos panameños como a centroamericanos, y de otros países.

Cooke es un incansable promotor de la arqueología panameña.

[News story: Fake ID gang jailed](#)

The criminal organisation was dismantled following an operation led by Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) Team.

From late 2015 until June 2017, officers gathered evidence which ultimately led to the conviction of 7 conspirators from Coventry, Nottingham, Redditch and London.

Over the course of their investigation, officers unearthed wide-scale distribution of British passports, British residence permits, degree certificates and Constructions Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards – all of them fake. Prices ranged from £900 for a passport to £200 for the CSCS card and degree certificate.

The gang was led by Steven Kanaventi, 39, of Mulliner Street, Coventry, and Alfred Adekoya, 47, of Kingslake Street, London. They were jailed at Woolwich Crown Court today (26 January) and each sentenced to 3 years 4 months and 2 weeks imprisonment having pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture a fake document at an earlier hearing.

Inspector Ben Thomas from CFI said:

The criminal business that Kanaventi and Adekoya were running was designed to undermine the fundamental immigration rule that if you have no legal status in the UK, you have no right to work. Their customers hoped that the fake documents would be enough to convince prospective employers that they were entitled to work, in turn allowing them to build a life for themselves in the UK to which they were simply not entitled.

By bringing Kanaventi, Adekoya and their associates to justice we have stopped a concerted, systematic and financially motivated assault on the UK's immigration system.

Adekoya was arrested on 20 June last year after making an exchange inside a betting shop in Woolwich with a man subsequently identified as Luke Nkanta, 29. When Adekoya was stopped and searched shortly after the transaction had been made he was found in possession of 3 counterfeit British passports.

When Nkanta, of Wordsworth House, Woolwich, was stopped he was found with an envelope containing a counterfeit British passport.

Also arrested on 20 June was Abdul Azeeza, 57. When officers raided his home

address in Missenden, Inville Road, they found him in possession of a fake residence permit, a fake passport as well as some of the paraphernalia – including specially adapted tools for dismantling passports, threads for stitching, paint thinners and laminating equipment – used in the manufacture of fake ID documents. He also had numerous orders for fake documents, some on his phone and some completed on betting slips.

Kanaventi was arrested at his home address just over a week later on 28 June. Arrested on the same day, each at their home addresses, were 3 accomplices:

- Paul Kanaventi, 37, of Forster Street, Nottingham
- Victor Ariyo, 53, of Rye Hill Park, London
- Madalitso Majawa, 33, of Ombersley Close, Redditch

Ben Thomas said:

Steven Kanaventi was a particularly brazen operator, to the extent that his social media alias – Chris Namatchanga – was a clear play on words of ‘name changer’.

Kanaventi was involved in every part of the Midlands operation. He set the prices, he placed the orders with his forger Ariyo and he was even caught on CCTV posting the counterfeit documents to his customers.

Like Adekoya and Steven Kanaventi, Ariyo, Azeeza, Paul Kanaventi, Nkanta and Majawa had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing. Ariyo admitted conspiracy to manufacture a fake document and money laundering. Azeeza admitted possessing fake documents and possessing equipment with the intention of making fake documents. Paul Kanaventi admitted money laundering. Nkanta and Majawa both admitted to possessing fake ID documents with improper intention.

The full breakdown of the sentences passed today at Woolwich Crown Court are:

- Steven Kanaventi – 3 years 4 months and 2 weeks
- Adekoya – 3 years 4 months and 2 weeks
- Paul Kanaventi – 9 months
- Azeeza – 4 years
- Ariyo – 3 years
- Nkanta – 1 year 4 months
- Majawa – 6 months

CFI will now pursue the confiscation of £135,000 of cash under the Proceeds of Crime Act which was sitting in a bank account belonging to Ariyo.

Speech: Penny Mordaunt speech at Edinburgh University with Bill Gates

Thank you. I am delighted to be here with you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, our global food system is failing us. One seventh of the population are going hungry.

The threats to our food supplies from droughts, floods and other climate shocks are increasing.

Emerging food crop and infectious livestock diseases threaten human, animal and plant health globally.

Migration and conflict magnify the challenges for our humanitarian system.

Put this against the backdrop of a rapidly rising world population, and the urgency of the task is clear.

Science and technology has a vital role to play in meeting these global threats, and can transform development challenges into opportunities.

The good news is that we are making progress. The support that the Department for International Development gives to cutting-edge research in the UK, is saving and transforming lives all over the world – from drought tolerant maize, to speeding up tuberculosis diagnosis, to affordable energy paid for through mobile phones.

Technology and innovation are already transforming our humanitarian responses. I am proud to be standing alongside Bill Gates today. Bill and Melinda's foundation has been at the forefront of championing innovative approaches to tackling poverty for years, and it is a pleasure to be working alongside them.

Drones and satellites are helping us map affected areas after disasters such as earthquakes and floods. New digital technologies are helping track emerging diseases which threaten food crops.

But, with our humanitarian and food systems stretched to breaking point, we must resolve to do more.

My Department is committed to supporting outstanding science and innovation. We recognise its value in building a more secure, stable and prosperous world for us all.

This is why DFID is committed to investing 3% of our budget to research that will continue to drive global progress.

Our Research Review, published just over a year ago, sets out our plans to target our research funding on addressing the greatest global challenges of

the 21st century.

Our aim is to help communities and governments build their own capability and become dynamic vibrant economies. As our trading partners of the future, this is very much in the UK's interests.

In Rwanda, by using digital technology, DFID has helped the revenue authority raise taxes, so supporting a sustainable route out of poverty.

Our commitment to research will mean we can act faster, reach more people – and get the most out of every pound we spend on behalf of the UK taxpayer.

It is UK science that has been at the forefront in many of our biggest successes.

A British vet, Walter Plowright, won the 1999 World Food Prize for his work developing a vaccine to help eradicate the global threat of the deadly cattle virus rinderpest – responsible for impoverishing millions of poor farmers around the world.

Cambridge University works with the UK Met Office and international scientists to track and prevent deadly outbreaks of wheat rust. This disease can have a devastating impact on food supply in some of the world's poorest places.

Our scientists, including those I met today from Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and from GALVmed – are at the forefront of efforts to help some of the world's poorest people. This is something British people can take pride in.

Agricultural development

Agricultural research is one of the most effective investments we can make in development.

But millions of farmers still lack access to the modern technologies that we take for granted here in the UK. This stifles the potential of African farming. It means that farmers can produce only a fraction of the food they could produce.

Without cattle that are protected from preventable illnesses and wheat that can withstand the threat of plant diseases – the lives and livelihoods of millions around the world are in jeopardy.

If we are to feed our world – in the nutritious way that enables people to thrive – we must speed up the pace of agricultural innovation. This will transform lives and economies all over the world.

That is why I'm proud to announce today new support from DFID to the global agriculture research system, the CGIAR.

New UK funding to the CGIAR will deliver crop varieties that are more productive, more nutritious and more resistant to droughts and flooding.

It will help poor farmers improve the health, wellbeing and productivity of their cattle and poultry.

Ultimately, UK Aid will help farmers put food on the table, educate their children and improve the climate resilience of their crops and livestock.

Importance of livestock

Millions of poor people around the world rely on livestock to feed their families, earn a living and send their children to school.

And Africa is changing fast. Urbanisation is driving great demand for livestock products. This provides wonderful opportunities for livestock producers.

But these new opportunities are currently hampered by untreatable livestock diseases. The sickness and death that results can devastate the livelihoods of farmers and their families and cause great suffering in livestock.

Not only that, but many of these diseases can pass to humans, and pose serious threat to the lives of the world's poorest people.

DFID's lasting commitment to research will continue to ensure rising demand for livestock is met in a way which benefits the poor, and protects and improves animal welfare and the environment.

Partnership with BMGF in agriculture and livestock research

To succeed, we must continue to work with our partners. That is why my Department joined forces with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2010 to tackle the most pervasive risks affecting poor farmers.

Together, we have supported a new drug for sleeping sickness in cattle – a disease which still kills three million animals each year and impoverishes farmers.

We are bringing cassava diseases under control, ensuring that the millions of people who depend on cassava can live secure and healthy lives.

And this morning I was impressed to see how we are working with the Foundation to develop a new and improved vaccine to combat brucellosis. This terrible livestock disease leads to huge economic losses every year – and is a danger to humans as well.

And we're not stopping there.

Today, at Edinburgh University, we are delighted to announce UK funding for the newly established Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health.

Over the next three years, scientists working here in Edinburgh will be transforming the lives of dairy and poultry farmers in Africa.

They will advance the science of cattle and poultry breeding to ensure that

the livestock sector meets its potential as a source of wealth and prosperity for many developing countries.

We will also support research to control bovine tuberculosis and other damaging livestock diseases.

Make no mistake – research investments like these are not only in the interests of some of the world's poorest. Tackling damaging livestock diseases is firmly in the national interest too. Diseases do not respect national borders.

They not only shatter the lives of poor farmers in Africa and Asia, but pose real risks to our own food supply. Tackling the spread of African Swine flu or better control of bovine TB for example, can only benefit UK farmers and consumers.

In this, and across all of my Department's work, we will actively ensure that animal welfare is protected and improved – recognising that animals are sentient, conscious beings worthy of moral consideration.

Conclusion

The UK is, and will remain, an outward-looking global research super-power.

We are proud of our outward-looking research culture here in the UK – and this government is committed to maintaining our position as a global leader in this field.

But no one country has all the answers today. We need to work across continents on bold, innovative solutions that harness the best of human ingenuity.

We know we can deliver spectacular results when we pool our resources and expertise.

To do this, we will continue to drive innovation through our strong partnerships – with UK academia, with the private sector and with our friends at the Gates Foundation.

Harnessing UK technology and innovation will help us reduce poverty and alleviate suffering and delivers a safer, more secure world for Britain too.

[Press release: Universal Periodic Review 29th session: Lord Ahmad's](#)

statement

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC) aimed at improving the human rights situation of all 193 UN member states. The UK strongly supports the UPR process, and we have spoken at every session and about every country since it began. This session saw reviews of 14 countries, namely Barbados, the Bahamas, Botswana, Burundi, France, Israel, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Tonga and the United Arab Emirates.

Modern slavery

During the session we ensured that modern slavery was raised at every review, alongside specific issues relevant to each country. Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking are horrific crimes, and the UK Government is fully committed to eradicating them by 2030 as set out in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal Article 8.7. The Prime Minister has made this a personal priority, and launched the Call to Action at the UN General Assembly in September 2017. I encourage all countries to endorse this Call to Action, to demonstrate leadership and drive change on an international scale. These are global crimes, and require a global response. The UPR process provides a valuable opportunity for us all to commit ourselves to make concrete changes and move the agenda forward, making a real difference to the lives of so many people.

UN Treaty Body membership

We also raised the issue of UN Treaty Body membership at every review this session. These expert bodies are a central part of the UN human rights system, charged with monitoring the implementation of human rights conventions in states which have signed up to them. The membership of Treaty Bodies is central to their success and the UK encourages states to adopt an open, merit-based selection process when selecting national candidates in order to improve membership quality.

Country reviews

Every country's UPR is important, and as I noted above the UK makes a point of engaging with each and every one of them. At the 29th session of the UPR, Israel and Burundi were among the highest profile of the countries under review.

Israel

I welcome Israel's engagement with the UPR and am pleased to see the positive steps taken since its last review, including its commitment to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; and the progress Israel has made on gender equality. However, the lack of reference in Israel's national submission to substantive progress on human rights issues in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is disappointing. Areas of concern include

the need to address Israeli policies on settlement expansion and demolitions.

The advancement by the Israeli authorities of plans, tenders and permits for thousands of settlement units across the West Bank is deeply concerning. Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine both the physical viability of the two-state solution and perceptions of Israel's commitment to it.

I am also seriously concerned by the Israeli authorities' continuous demolition of Palestinian properties in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. As the UK has made clear in the past, these demolitions cause unnecessary suffering and are harmful to the objective of achieving peace.

Finally, the matter of children in detention in Israel remains highly concerning. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Israel is a State Party, clearly sets out the need to grant special care and protection to children. I hope Israel recognises these responsibilities and takes the necessary action to ensure that child detainees are protected, including to engage with partners, like the UK, on best practice.

Burundi

While I welcome Burundi's participation in the UPR process, I remain deeply concerned that the Government of Burundi has shown no willingness to acknowledge and make efforts to improve the deteriorating human rights situation. It is also distressing that the Government of Burundi continues to facilitate a culture of impunity for the perpetrators. Specific areas which need to be addressed and investigated are arbitrary detentions, violence and executions by security forces, and attacks against human rights defenders. I urge the Government of Burundi to review, in good faith, all of the recommendations made in the UPR; and encourage them to co-operate with the OHCHR and the Commission of Inquiry. The UK and the international community stand ready to work with the Government of Burundi to improve the situation.

Conclusion

I encourage all countries reviewed during this session to give serious consideration to accepting the UK's recommendations. I trust that those recommendations which are accepted will be fully implemented in a timely manner. I look forward to the formal adoption of these UPRs at the 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council, in June 2018.

[Speech: SOLACE Annual Elections](#) **[Conference speech: 25 January 2018](#)**

I'm extremely pleased to be here before you today and it's an important part

of my role to speak to the people charged with the responsibility for the effective running of the electoral processes that underpin our overall democratic system.

As some of you might be aware, I was the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform five years ago and being able to look back at the work I was leading then gives me an opportunity to acknowledge just how much has been achieved by you all.

We have much new work in train, such as changing the provisions relating to overseas electors, responding to the recommendations in the report on electoral fraud by Sir Eric Pickles – including the piloting of ID in polling stations and changes to postal voting that will be tested at the elections in May – and plans to reform the position on the annual canvass.

Change has not stopped whilst I have been away from the elections brief and I hope to take forward further change for the better in the coming years also. That is a journey we will want to make together, taking account of our various needs and views and involving other major partners such as the AEA and Electoral Commission.

We have had, on a UK-wide basis, two General Elections, a European Parliamentary election and a referendum, plus the whole range of more local level polls that happen on a regular basis – and that these have been successfully delivered. That is an impressive track record and I thank you for your role in delivering those polls alongside substantive system changes.

Modernising registration to build on IER

First I'd like to deal with IER, familiar to us all. IER represents the biggest change to electoral registration in over 100 years and has brought some aspects of registering to vote into the 21st century. The introduction of IER was managed in such a way that register completeness remained stable – thanks to a major effort by government and EROs during the transition – while register accuracy improved considerably. IER has also significantly reduced the risk of registration fraud.

Making registration more digital was also transformative. More than 30 million people have used our digital service, most of them directly through the website which continues to receive very high user satisfaction. Use of the website peaks around an election and whilst this has an impact on your administration teams which we are keen to address, we need to recognise that our registers are more complete because of this. The availability of the website until midnight on the deadline day far surpasses the use of Household Notification Letters or other means of trying to get people to register ahead of an election.

But our public service reform agenda does not end with the introduction of IER and the digital service. There are further changes we can make to improve service effectiveness and efficiency. As with IER, our reform programme will work best if it is a collaboration, involving all key delivery partners with a focus on the practical changes we can make now.

We need EROs and their teams to be open to change if our reform programme is to have the benefits we all want. We have already made changes to allow more of the registration process to take place digitally – for example, allowing the e-mailing of Invitations to Register.

Take up of these new flexibilities has been much slower than expected. When so many other elements of local services are online or digital, why should so many teams continue to use so many paper forms? Especially when citizens' expectations around communication have shifted so radically.

I am keen to work with you to understand delivery barriers and to promote good practice – but there will also be a need for leadership within your organisations to build capability in your electoral teams in the same way you have met the challenge of modernisation in other services.

Reforming the canvass

So of course, there is a clear role for government to make changes that only we can make to allow you to deliver more modern services. That is why we have put reforming the annual canvass, through legislation to support innovation, at the heart of our modernising registration agenda.

We recognise that by law the current process is very paper-based, with EROs under a duty to issue sometimes several copies of the same forms to the same households, with inevitably diminishing returns.

We also know there is a huge opportunity cost here, with much statutory activity involving the pursuit of information from households where there has been no change.

Of course, we must make changes to the annual canvass only with care. It matters that we give people an opportunity to register to vote as circumstances change and it matters that we keep our registers updated. That's why we have been piloting changes to the canvass through which we can properly understand the effect of doing things differently and be confident that any changes we make will be not just more economically sustainable but also support high quality registration.

Our latest pilots ended in December and we are currently evaluating them. The Electoral Commission is also conducting an evaluation. We are confident the pilots will help us make the case for canvass reform to benefit all EROs and their teams. It is too early to say exactly which changes we will make as a result of this process, but we believe there will be ways of harnessing the power of government data, supplemented by your local data, to focus the canvass on areas of change, significantly reducing overall activity without affecting the quality of the register. I very much look forward to working with SOLACE colleagues, the Electoral Commission and the AEA and others as we seek to roll out ideas developed following the pilots.

Democratic Engagement Plan

One of the opportunities we want to explore linked to canvass change is refocusing current activity away from form processing to engagement with those people who have been persistently under-represented on the register.

As I said in Parliament recently, my predecessor, Chris Skidmore, did excellent work in the Every Voice Matters project where he visited every region and nation across Great Britain.

During this tour he met more than 100 organisations, including representatives of the electoral community to understand some of the barriers to registration for certain groups and how they might be overcome. There was a lot of great activity underway, but also evidence that innovation and engagement could be more widespread.

In December, the government published its first democratic engagement plan which sets out how we plan to tackle democratic exclusion and increase participation among under registered groups, over coming years. The plan sets out the evidence on registration levels. But it also shows that there is more we can do to understand the picture of registration across the country.

As part of this, we are going to launch an Atlas of Democratic Variation. Made up of interactive maps, this will bring together a lot of different sources of information on registration, the use of the online service and population data.

The Atlas will help complete our understanding of what the registration picture is like across the country. And we expect it to inspire activity across the country to plug gaps or build on positive action already under way. I have no doubt that EROs should be among the first users of the Atlas so that you can understand the impact of your activity and judge your success in maintaining a complete and accurate register.

National Democracy Week

One other aspect of our democratic engagement work I want to touch on is National Democracy Week. Our inaugural week at the beginning of July 2018 is timed to link in with the Suffrage Centenary celebrations. The overarching aim for the week is to bring together organisations from across the public, private and charity sectors for a week of unified national action.

A National Democracy Week council has been formed in order to shape and deliver the main focus and format of the event in July and I really welcome the involvement of a SOLACE representative on the Council.

The government will work with this council and other partners to develop a full programme of events and activity, which will include stakeholder owned activity to promote and encourage engagement in democracy.

And we are encouraging all local authorities to plan early so that they are able to deliver activity during National Democracy week.

The aim of that is to inspire people about UK democracy and its importance. Much suffrage-linked activity is aimed at inspiring young people in particular, as well as encouraging more women to get into political and public life. These are both priorities I hugely endorse and I very much hope you will all start putting in place plans to mark National Democracy Week and the Suffrage Centenary in your local area if you do not already have things arranged.

Elections and other areas

I will move on now from the package of registration measures now to look at other areas of our work where we want to drive forward positive changes

Integrity of elections

Given that you have already heard from Mark Hughes this morning, I will just touch on the area of electoral integrity and tackling fraud, the potential for fraud and, importantly, the perception of fraud.

We have a clear path for building a democracy that is clear and secure. Over the coming months and years we will be working closely with key partner organisations to deliver a comprehensive programme of work for reforming our electoral system and strengthening electoral integrity.

This work is guided by Sir Eric Pickles' comprehensive review, which made a number of recommendations for strengthening the integrity of the electoral process. Mark has already updated you on the progress of these recommendations which will include our plans to trial forms of identification at polling stations in five local authority regions across the country at this years local elections.

But introducing Voter ID is just one strand of the government's commitment to improve the security and resilience of the electoral system that underpins our democracy and will ensure that people have confidence in our democratic processes.

Intimidation in Public Life

Related to integrity, the Committee on Standards in Public Life has recently published its report on intimidation in public life. If we are to have a strong and effective democracy we need to attract capable people to stand for public office at all levels and we need to ensure that they are supported to be able to get on with their jobs when in office. That report makes a number of recommendations in relation to elections and which we will want to look at carefully.

Accessibility of Elections

And just as we need to support those willing to take office, we need to support eligible electors who face challenges in choosing whom they want to represent them. As the Minister responsible for elections it is important to

me that everyone in society can participate in our democratic process, and the government is committed to improving the accessibility of future elections, including for disabled people.

As a government we have taken action to address the challenges disabled people face by ensuring that the register to vote website is compatible with assistive technology, in supporting the production of Easy Read guidance in partnership with the Royal Mencap Society and in working with the Department of Health to bring elections within the remit of the Certificate of Vision Impairment so that people with visual impairment can be more readily informed of support available to them.

But I do recognise that more needs to be done, as reflected in the 256 responses to the recent Call for Evidence on accessibility of elections. We will use the information and evidence they provide to enhance the government's understanding of the experiences of disabled people in registering to vote and in casting their votes. In partnership with the Accessibility of Elections Working Group, the government will be publishing a report in Spring of key findings and recommendations to be taken forward.

The group which includes representatives from SOLACE, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission and leading charities, is also providing valuable input to the ID pilots, as it is important to the success of those pilots that anyone with a right to vote is able to so.

Citizen focus

The citizen focus is something I am keen to promote. I want us to think of the citizen in all aspects of the changes we bring about going forward. The Register to Vote website is a recent product of that kind of thinking, and whilst it may bring some issues in terms of processes, I think it is undeniable that it provides a better and more accessible service for the citizen.

Law Commission work

That said, I do appreciate that you and your teams face hurdles in delivering elections also, not least in the actual legislation itself.

I mentioned the work of the Law Commissions earlier and their review of the legislation and I am pleased to say that this work continues with the support of Cabinet Office as well as the Electoral Commission, the AEA and SOLACE.

We are hopeful that in the absence of any primary legislative slot, we can find a way to make changes through secondary legislation which brings a reduction in the volume of legislative instruments and consistency to the processes applicable to all polls.

I recognise that this is also part of removing risk from the delivery aspect of elections. That simplification and consistency can help to avoid errors and helps to reduce demands on resources that are ever more pressured in the context of savings within local authorities and a continuing loss of

experienced staff.

Resilience of electoral services and future planning

Those demands are something we want to continue to look at, despite the change of the scheduled General Election from 2020 to 2022. 2020, of course, still poses a challenge with the range of elections planned including the new Combined authority mayors alongside PCC and the GLA polls as well as local elections.

I'm keen to see you, as Returning Officers with personal responsibility for delivery, play a role in discussions on this area, whether through SOLACE or individually, in order to get the strategic perspective from within local authorities on how we can best tackle resource and planning issues.

Overseas electors

Many British citizens who have moved overseas wish to continue to vote in parliamentary elections in the UK. The government is committed to scrapping the rule that bars British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from voting. We will shortly publish further details about what we intend to do before the next scheduled General Election in 2022.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with the electoral community in order to introduce votes for life for British citizens overseas.

European Parliamentary elections and EU citizens

The Prime Minister has made clear her intention that the UK leaves the European Union in March 2019.

Subject to Parliamentary confirmation, we intend to remove the requirement to hold by-elections for the European Parliament where existing party lists are exhausted in the near future, which should remove a previously ever-present risk of resource demands and cost.

Given that intention to leave, the government is exploring the voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens resident in the UK once we leave the European Union.

There are many other ongoing initiatives and challenges that face us that I have not included in this speech.

I repeat my thanks to you for your work.

I am keen that we most definitely – and collectively – look forward.

We still have much to do that can improve the electoral process for the public both in terms of registration and the conduct of polls.

There will be challenges in doing this work as there always are and I look to you, both as SOLACE the organisation and each of you as Electoral Registration and Returning Officers, to play a significant role in helping us to achieve change for the better.