

News story: Defence Secretary in Doha as multi-billion pound jet contract with Qatar is signed

The Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and his Qatari counterpart, Khalid bin Mohammed al Attiyah, oversaw the signing of the deal for 24 Typhoons, building on the Statement of Intent signed in September.

In addition, the agreement signed today by the Qatar and British Governments also includes a clear intention to proceed with the purchase of Hawk aircraft.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

It is a great pleasure to sign our biggest export deal for the Typhoon in a decade. These formidable jets will boost the Qatari military's mission to tackle the challenges we both share in the Middle East, supporting stability in the region and delivering security at home.

As we proudly fly the flag for our world-leading aerospace sector all over the globe this news is a massive vote of confidence, supporting thousands of British jobs and injecting billions into our economy.

The aircraft will be assembled in the UK by BAE Systems, supporting thousands of jobs, especially at the company's Warton site in Lancashire where it will secure work on the production line into the next decade. The biggest export deal for the Typhoon project in a decade, the purchase is valued at around £6 billion.

The deal also includes an agreement with MBDA for Brimstone and Meteor missiles and the highly-accurate Raytheon's Paveway IV UK-manufactured weapon for the jets. The Defence Secretary also agreed a package of training and co-operation between the Air Forces which will see them working together more regularly, including Qatari pilots and ground-crew training in the UK.

The UK and Qatar share a close and longstanding defence relationship, with a joint-exercise between the Royal Air Force and the Emir of Qatar's Air Force just last week seeing Typhoon jets fly over the Arabian Peninsula. The two countries share mutual interests of countering violent extremism, and ensuring stability in the region, and this purchase will deepen those ties by helping to prevent terrorism from spreading and protecting our prosperity and security at home.

Qatar is the ninth country to purchase the Typhoon, with this year seeing the first delivered to Oman. The Ministry of Defence is also leading the offer to

replace Belgium's F-16s with the jets and continues to discuss the prospect of a second batch of sales to Saudi Arabia, as it continues to bang the drum for Britain's world-leading aerospace industry around the world.

Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day reminds us that it can be easy to take for granted many of the freedoms we enjoy in the UK.

The freedom to be who you want, love who you want, worship or not worship and to live your life as you please is denied to millions across the globe.

Everywhere I go in the world where we have concerns about human rights I raise these frankly because we believe that engagement is the best way to encourage reform.

Standing up for human rights is not only the right thing; it also helps to create a safer, more prosperous and progressive world. This is what Global Britain stands for. And promoting, championing and defending human rights is integral to the work of the Foreign Office and part of the everyday work of all British diplomats.

News story: Chancellor visit to Saudi Arabia: 10 December 2017

The Chancellor is expected to discuss a range of issues, including the economic reform plan Vision 2030.

The Chancellor, Philip Hammond has travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and the Ministers of Finance, Energy, and Economy and Planning.

The Chancellor is expected to discuss a range of issues, including the economic reform plan Vision 2030, the situation in the Yemen, and trade and investment with the UK.

He is accompanied by Ken Costa, the Special Representative for Vision 2030, and Donald Brydon, the Chairman of the London Stock Exchange Group.

The Chancellor said:

Saudi Arabia is a key partner for the UK and we are offering ongoing support as it progresses with its ambitious economic reform plan, Vision 2030.

We will work closely with Saudi Arabia as it modernises and its economy diversifies, ensuring that both our nations benefit from the growing trade and investment opportunities.

The Chancellor will also meet female Saudi entrepreneurs including alumni from UK universities.

The visit follows [the Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia last month](#).

News story: Britain open for business as UK and China further relax limits on flights

Britain's regions are set for an economic boost after a landmark agreement for a 50% boost in the number of flights allowed between the UK and China.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling today (10 December 2017) unveiled the deal, which allows for a huge expansion in routes from regional airports – potentially boosting local economies by hundreds of millions of pounds by opening up new business and tourism opportunities.

The announcement builds on [successful discussions in October 2016](#) that saw limits on passenger flights between the 2 countries raised from 40 per week to a maximum of 100.

The number of Chinese tourists visiting the UK has rocketed during the first half of this year. Between January and June, 115,000 visits were made from China to the UK, a rise of 47% on the same period last year. Spending also increased to £231 million, up 54%.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

These agreements are an important part of preparing Britain for a post-Brexit world and making sure we have access to key markets in the Far East, and they come at a time when our exports are growing and we continue to attract international investment. It just underlines that Britain will do well regardless of the outcome of

the Brexit negotiations.

The whole government is working to secure the best possible future relationship with the EU, and great progress has been made this week, but no one should believe that Britain's future success depends on decisions taken in Brussels.

Under the current arrangement, agreed in October 2016, a maximum of 100 passenger flights per week can operate between the UK and China, with this figure set to increase to 150 under the terms of the new deal.

Chinese tourists are some of the UK's highest spenders, staying longer and travelling more than visitors from other countries.

Last year, Manchester airport launched the first direct regional flight between the 2 countries, worth an estimated £250 million in economic benefits to the UK over the next decade.

During the same year restrictions were relaxed allowing an unlimited number of cargo flights to operate between the UK and China. By the end of 2016, more than 74,000 tonnes of freight had been transported between the UK and China by air, an increase of 27% when compared to 2015.

News story: Government launches consultation on accelerated degrees

Students could be left over £25,000 better off by choosing an accelerated degree instead of a traditional three-year course, according to proposals set out today in a new government consultation.

Accelerated degrees offer the same qualifications and are quality-assured in the same way as a standard degree, but delivered over a shorter, usually two-year timespan. This means when most students are completing their third year of study, an accelerated degree student will be starting work and getting a salary.

The proposals, announced today (10 December), include a £5,500 (20 per cent) saving for students in total tuition costs compared to a standard three-year course. When added to the average salary of £19,000 in the first year after graduating, it means a potential £25,000 benefit overall.

For the taxpayer, it means significantly lower tuition loan outlay, higher rates of repayment and therefore a lower cost to the public purse of higher education. A higher proportion of students on accelerated degrees will also repay their loans in full.

Although the proposals allow institutions to charge up to 20 per cent more each year for accelerated degrees, the overall tuition fee cost of the degree to the student is 20 per cent less than the same degree over three years.

Providers already offering accelerated degrees report on more engaged students, positive employer feedback and the opportunity to attract a wider pool of applicants, including mature students who often want to retrain and enter the workplace more quickly.

New fee arrangements for these degrees are set to be in place by September 2019, subject to parliamentary approval.

Universities Minister Jo Johnson said:

For too long we have been stuck with a system that has increasingly focused on offering only one way of benefiting from higher education, via the classic three year degree programme.

The passage of the Higher Education and Research Act this year has finally enabled us to break the mould of this one-size-fits-all system so students have much more choice over how they learn.

Many will want to stick with the classic three year university experience, but for highly motivated students hungry for a faster pace of learning and a quicker route into or back into work, at lower overall cost, two year degrees will be well worth considering.

Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, said.

Accelerated degrees are an attractive option for mature students who have missed out on the chance to go to university as a young person. Having often battled disadvantage, these students can thrive in higher education and I hope that now many more will be able to take up the life-changing opportunity to get a degree.

There has been historic cross-party support for this policy, from Shirley Williams in the 1960s, to Labour spokesman Lord Stevenson, Roberta Blackman-Woods, Lord Liddle and Lord Watson who all supported it in the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill.

There are a range of accelerated courses currently on offer – including Law, Accountancy and English – but the ambition is make more courses available across the widest possible range of subjects.

Karl McCormack, who teaches accelerated degrees in Accounting & Finance at Staffordshire University, commented on the increased focus of students on accelerated courses.

I find that the accelerated degree offers so much more to students, including the extra focus, the drive and the immersive experience of constantly learning over the two years.

Accelerated degrees appeal to a broad spectrum of students, including mature students who want to retrain and enter the workplace more quickly, and those who do not take a traditional A-level route into higher education.

Laura Montague, a student in her final year of an accelerated degree at Staffordshire University, said:

The fast-track course is exactly the right option for me. Being able to do the course in a two-year timeframe instead of three really makes you dive into the course knowing that completion is not far off. It also prepares you well in terms of how the working environment will be when you finish.

Providers offering accelerated degrees will need to meet exactly the same quality assurance measures as for the standard three-year equivalent degrees.

The new regulator, the Office for Students, will also support the provision of accelerated degrees when it becomes a legal entity in 2018.

The consultation will run until February 2018.