

Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis – Statement following meetings with party leaders

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP, has today met with the leaders of Northern Ireland's five main political parties; Michelle O'Neill, Sinn Féin; Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, DUP; Naomi Long, Alliance; Doug Beattie, UUP; and Colum Eastwood, SDLP.

In all his meetings, the Secretary of State reiterated the need to respect the electoral outcome of Thursday's election and restore the full functioning of the devolved institutions as soon as possible – both the Executive and the Assembly.

All parties agreed on the importance of maintaining political stability. The Secretary of State encouraged all party leaders to come together to form an Executive as soon as possible, starting with the nomination of an Assembly Speaker.

The Secretary of State acknowledged that the Northern Ireland Protocol remains a clear barrier to political stability and re-confirmed that the Government will do whatever it takes to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, in all of its dimensions. He reiterated the Government's desire to address the outstanding issues by agreement with the EU, but confirmed that the Government stood ready to take further steps to rectify those issues, should that be necessary.

He noted that negotiations with the European Commission related to the Protocol were the responsibility of the UK Government and that they should not stand in the way of restoring the Stormont institutions and enabling the Executive to deliver for all the people of Northern Ireland.

He reiterated the importance of taking advantage of the new provisions in the NI (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Act passed earlier this year to enable continuity in decision-making during the Executive formation process. This will ensure existing Northern Ireland ministers can remain in place to oversee NI departments, allow legislation to progress and support the delivery of vital public services.

Speaking after his meetings, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, said:

“Northern Ireland's party leaders must come together to agree a way forward to deliver a stable and accountable devolved government.

“The UK Government's overriding priority remains the preservation of peace and stability in Northern Ireland and the protection of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its strands. The current situation with the Protocol

is fundamentally undermining the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and creating an unacceptable situation in Northern Ireland. We will continue to press the EU to agree the crucial changes that are urgently needed but will take nothing off the table in our pursuit of those solutions.

“As I conveyed to party leaders today, our collective focus must be on the restoration of the Stormont institutions so that those newly elected representatives can come together and deliver in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland.

“I will remain in close contact with the party leaders over the coming days.”

[Attorney General visits Ukraine to support investigation of Russian war crimes](#)

Press release

The Attorney General led a delegation of war crimes experts in Poland today as part of the UK’s support for Ukraine’s investigations into Russian atrocities



The Attorney General, Suella Braverman QC MP, has today visited Ukraine and met with Ukrainian Prosecutor General, Iryna Venediktova. She also led a delegation of war crimes experts in Poland as part of the UK’s support for Ukraine’s investigations into Russian atrocities.

The delegation included Sir Howard Morrison QC, who the Attorney appointed as an independent adviser to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General’s Office in March. This follows the [Foreign Secretary’s announcement](#) (29 April) that the UK would deploy a team of war crimes experts to support Ukraine’s investigations.

As part of the visit, the Attorney met the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, Iryna Venediktova, to discuss what more the UK can do to support her work to bring war criminals to justice. At the meeting, the Attorney heard first-hand about Ukrainian evidence-gathering processes, their plans to prosecute individuals for war crimes in their national courts, and their collaboration with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Commenting on the visit, the Attorney General, Suella Braverman QC MP, said:

Russia has brought barbarity to Ukraine and committed vile atrocities, including against women. I am pleased to have led the UK delegation of war crimes experts to Ukraine and to have met those leading Ukraine's journey to justice, including the indefatigable Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova. I am determined that British expertise will help Iryna and her team to uncover the truth and hold Putin's regime to account for its actions. Justice will be done.

Commenting on the Attorney General's visit, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said:

While courts around the world are working to hold Russia accountable, the bulk of the investigation – and the largest number of prosecutions – will be done by Ukraine itself. I am grateful for the UK's help and to Attorney General Braverman for visiting Ukraine to show her personal support for bringing every perpetrator to justice.

Notes

- The Attorney General led a delegation including Sir Howard Morrison QC, the independent adviser to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, PSVI/CRSV experts, a Major in the Royal Military Police with expertise in the military aspects of war crimes, and a UK Government Conflict Adviser.
- The scoping mission will meet Ukrainian government and civil society from Poland via video call. They will also hold a range of meetings with international partners including representatives of the US, EU and other international stakeholders in Rzeszow and Warsaw.
- The delegation will produce a report with findings from the visit that will inform the UK Government's work to support Ukraine's war crimes prosecutions
- The Attorney General is the first UK Minister to visit Ukraine since the Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Prime Minister hosts Spring Showcase at Downing Street to promote best of British business

- Downing Street transformed into street market with stallholders from across the UK to champion best of British businesses
- Stallholders include IGS Vertical Farming from Scotland, Tregothnan Tea from England and Flawsome!Drinks from Wales
- Prime Minister joined by Cabinet ministers to support businesses who are seizing global opportunities for growth, jobs and investment

The UK Prime Minister has hosted a Spring Showcase at Downing Street today (Monday 09 May) to fly the flag for British food and consumer goods and showcase small independent businesses who are exporting their goods internationally.

Ten businesses held market stalls across Downing Street to exhibit their finest products including Blaenafon Cheddar Company, a Welsh family business, IGS Vertical Farming, based in Scotland and Dogtooth Technologies, a technology start-up building state-of-the-art intelligent robots for soft fruit picking.

The Prime Minister was joined by Cabinet Ministers including the International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Environment Secretary George Eustice and Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng who also met with stallholders.

There are now more opportunities than ever for businesses thanks to the trade deals that have been agreed across 70 nations, including countries in the EU – accounting for £808 billion of UK bilateral trade in 2021. We had the fastest economic growth in the G7 last year and international trade is essential in achieving our mission to level up and drive growth across the whole country.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Putting the best of British business on the global market is a vital part of growing our economy – with exports bringing £640.3 billion last year alone.

Every corner of the UK is filled with exceptionally talented businesses and I'm delighted that today we have been able to showcase some of the best of what this country has to offer.

Those invited to the event also include the Founder and CEO of Genius Foods, Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne, also chair of Scotland Food and Drink, Michael Bell, CEO of the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA) and Chair of the Food and Drink Federation Karen Betts who works closely with the Department for International Trade as the voice of the UK food industry.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

It's fantastic to see so many examples of great UK businesses thriving thanks to the trade and export opportunities we've made available to them.

As we continue our journey as an independent free-trading nation our Export Strategy offers a wealth of support for existing as well as new-to-market traders.

We're rightly proud of our small business exporters, and I want to see more of our brilliant products made here in the UK sold to the world.

CEO of St Eval's Ian Greaves said:

As a British manufacturer based in rural Cornwall, we are delighted to be given the opportunity to showcase St. Eval alongside some of the best of British business at this event.

People and planet are at the very heart of all that we do and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our passion for sustainability far and wide. From using renewable energy to power our factory, through to plastic-free packaging and protecting and nurturing the natural world around us; high-quality craftsmanship and minimising our environmental impact are of the utmost importance.

In recognition of our commitment to sustainability, in 2021 we were honoured with a Queen's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development. As the first-ever Queen's Award for a candle manufacturer, we strive to set the standard for actions to preserve the natural world around us and pioneer leadership in sustainable British manufacturing.

Last year the Government launched an Export Strategy which will help businesses across the UK double exports and sell their world-class products around the globe. The 12-point export strategy will give businesses the tools they need to become a nation of exporters and reap the benefits of our free trade deals.

[Students in Wales are reminded to apply for student finance before deadline](#)

It's estimated that more than 1.5million people will attend college or university this autumn, and the Student Loans Company (SLC) is urging students to [apply for student finance](#) in plenty of time.

SLC's role is to enable opportunity for students to invest in their futures through access to further and higher education, and new full time, undergraduate students in Wales have just under three weeks to apply for funding before the deadline on Friday, 27 May.

Students should apply online now even if they don't have a confirmed place at university. By submitting their application before the deadline, they can ensure their finance will be in place for the start of the academic year.

Returning students in England also need to reapply for student finance every year, and the deadline for applications is Friday, 17 June.

Chris Larmer, SLC Executive Director, Operations said: "Our mission is to enable opportunity and we are committed to supporting students to achieve their ambitions.

"Our application window opened earlier this year, which gives students plenty of time to apply before the deadline to ensure they have the best possible start to their further or higher education journey. We know that this can seem daunting, particularly for new students, but there is a range of content on our website and social media channels to help guide students, and their parents or partners, through the process. Applying early means that busy students can tick at least one thing off their list as they prepare for university life."

Chris added: "Applications can take around six to eight weeks to process and for the vast majority, the whole experience will be online. Students can monitor their application's progress via their online accounts and if we need any further information, we will get in touch directly."

Students can continue to apply for finance throughout the summer, but SLC is not able to guarantee that funding will be in place for the start of term.

Tips for applying for student finance

- [Apply online now](#) even if you don't have a confirmed place at university – It only takes 20 minutes to apply and the quickest and easiest way to do so is online at

<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/discover-student-finance>

- You should apply now even if you don't know what course you are doing, or which university you are going to. Select the course you are most likely to do, and you can update the application easily later, if required.
- Have your important documents to hand when applying – Have your National Insurance Number, passport and bank details to hand before you start your application, as you will be asked for this information as you apply. If you don't have a bank account in your own name, we would encourage you to set one up to ensure you receive your funding.
- Provide your supporting evidence online – To make an application you will need to create an online account and you may be asked to provide evidence to support your application. Don't forget to submit any evidence you are asked for. All evidence, apart from some forms of ID or residency evidence, can be submitted digitally via your online account.
- Tell us if your household income has changed – If you have applied for a Maintenance Loan based on household income, then your sponsor – usually your parents or partner- will be asked to provide details of their household income for the previous tax year. For 22/23 academic year applications, that's the 20-21 tax year. If your sponsor expects their income to drop by 15% or more, it is possible to request a Current Year Income (CYI) assessment.
- A CYI can only be requested once you have submitted your application and your sponsor has also submitted their household income for the 20-21 tax year to support your application too. To do this, visit <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/parents-and-partners/how-does-household-income-affect-an-application.aspx> to download a digital version of the form once you have filled it in you can then upload it directly from your online account.
- Make sure you understand how much funding you may be entitled to Students in Wales can apply for a Tuition Fee Loan to pay for tuition fees and a Maintenance Loan and Grant to help with living costs. Visit the SFW website to find out what's available. Watch the Discover Student Finance film to find out more.
- Find out if you could be eligible for extra support – Extra funding may be available if you have a disability or a child or adult dependant who relies on you financially. <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-finance/full-time/welsh-student/>
- Follow Student Finance Wales (SFW) on social media Students can stay up to date with all the latest student finance information by following SFW on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

[Cultural venues to receive £128](#)

million to improve access to arts and culture

- Access to arts and culture in areas with low levels of cultural engagement to be boosted through the £30.8 million Cultural Development Fund
- Local library services to be improved with £20.5 million Libraries Improvement Fund
- Urgent museum maintenance and infrastructure works to be funded through £63.3 million Museum Estate Development Fund

Cultural venues including museums, galleries and public libraries are to benefit from up to £128 million of funding to help improve accessibility to the arts and safeguard their futures.

Organisations are now being encouraged to submit expressions of interest to receive support following the previous allocation of £48 million worth of funding to 60 organisations earlier this year.

Venues across the country have already benefited from the fund including the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, which earlier this year received £5 million to fund structural work to safeguard the building for future generations, and Bletchley Park, which was given £468,000 for essential maintenance works to its buildings.

Funding of infrastructure projects at museums, improvements in local library services and investment in community-focused cultural sites will ensure that these cultural assets at the heart of communities will help regional economies and protect their unique local heritage for generations to come.

Support will be targeted to areas which have historically had lower levels of cultural investment as part of the government's commitment to levelling up access to culture across the country.

Funding will be targeted on locally-led cultural projects, museums and public libraries in England.

Arts Minister Lord Parkinson said:

Cultural institutions form the heart of communities across the country and it is important that we provide them with the support they need.

This funding will help make culture more accessible to everyone,

including people who may not have enjoyed its benefits before, as well as supporting vital maintenance work to secure the future of many venues. It is an important part of our plan to level up the country, for the benefit of everybody.

Darren Henley chief executive of Arts Council England said:

Artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries have the power to animate and energise villages, towns and cities in amazing and innovative ways.

This new investment in culture and creativity will help people across the country to enjoy happier lives.

Hedley Swain, CEO of the Royal Pavillion & Museums Trust in Brighton, which previously received £1.4 million through the first round of the Museum Estate and Development Fund, said:

We are so grateful to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Arts Council England for this important award from the Cultural Investment Funds, including Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND). It will allow us to make urgent and timely repairs to the roof of Brighton Museum and Art Gallery allowing us to stay open and plan with confidence for the future. Additional funding will be provided by Brighton & Hove City Council to whom we are also deeply grateful. Brighton Museum is an important historic building in its own right, part of the Royal Pavilion estate. It's so important that buildings like this are maintained for the benefit of current and future generations".

Councillor Sue Smith, cabinet member for communities and cooperation at Rochdale Borough Council, which previously received £4,199,365 through the Cultural Development Fund, said:

The CDF funding means we can take forward our exciting plans for a new Rochdale Cultural District, bringing together our outstanding heritage and cultural assets to attract more visitors, create new opportunities for residents and to complement the growing town centre retail, food and leisure offer. We will also be creating a new cultural partnership to develop and deliver more projects across the borough, increasing opportunities for residents, creatives and creative businesses.

The Cultural Investment Fund covers the following three streams:

Cultural Development Fund

The £30.8 million Cultural Development Fund aims to give people access to arts and culture in areas with historically low levels of cultural engagement to help support economic growth. The fund helps transform cultural sites which are at the heart of communities such as Middlesbrough Council Cultural Services and Barnsley Museums.

Libraries Improvement Fund

The £20.5 million Libraries Improvement Fund will transform library services in England by helping them upgrade their buildings and improve digital infrastructure. Local authorities can bid for the money on behalf of their library services.

Museum Estate and Development Fund

The £60.3 million Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) helps fund urgent museum maintenance and infrastructure works beyond their day-to-day budgets. Arts Council England accredited museums in England that are not directly funded by DCMS can apply. This could include organisations like the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Hull & East Riding Museum.

In March, £48 million was awarded to 60 cultural institutions in England through the first round of the Cultural Investment Fund, with venues including the London Transport Museum and Leicester Museum & Art Gallery receiving money. Sandwell Library and Information Service in the West Midlands was also awarded £495,000, while Berwick Barracks in Northumberland was awarded £4 million to turn it into a year-round cultural venue.

Ends

Notes to Editors

[Cultural Development Fund](#)

[Libraries Improvement Fund](#)

[Museum Estate and Development Fund](#)

These funds follow a number of other successful government interventions to support the UK's cultural organisations. The £2 billion Culture Recovery Fund helped thousands of organisations survive the pandemic. Earlier this year the government also announced an additional £75 million of arts funding, which will be distributed by 2025 to places that have been culturally under-served in the past. This is part of its efforts to level up access to the arts through the highest level of investment by the taxpayer in culture in the post-war period.

[Previous Cultural Investment Fund recipients](#)