

# News story: Defence Secretary announces 1,500th signing of Armed Forces Covenant

Building materials supplier Travis Perkins were revealed as the 1,500th signatory during the third annual Partnering with Defence employer conference at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London today.

Speaking at the conference, Sir Michael said:

By signing the Covenant, Travis Perkins joins firms across Britain committed to ensuring those who serve or have served our country are better supported.

Reaching this milestone also shows growing recognition of the unique skills and experience that reservists and former service personnel offer their organisations.

Amongst their commitments, Travis Perkins has pledged to provide Armed Forces personnel and veterans with a variety of work experience placements in their centres, branches, and stores across the country and are supporting members of the Royal Engineers in gaining NVQ qualifications for their construction skills.

Travis Perkins currently employs nine reservists and other members of the Armed Forces community across the country.

Maria Walding, a Compliance Manager at Travis Perkins, who is an Army Cadet Force adult volunteer, said:

The Travis Perkins Group has fully supported and values my role as a Reservist. I am proud to say I work for a company that consistently gives military personnel the chance to use their existing skills and build a lasting career outside of the military.

Travis Perkins CEO John Carter said:

As a business, Travis Perkins has long recognised the valuable skills and attributes those with a serving background can contribute, not only to our own workforce but also to the wider economy.

We are delighted to not only be here to celebrate the Group's commitment and ongoing support of the Armed Forces in our signing

of the Armed Forces Covenant, but incredibly proud and honoured to be recognised along with our community of ex forces and serving colleagues, as the 1500th organisation to do so.

Travis Perkins joins a growing number of businesses that are making tangible pledges to the Armed Forces community.

Earlier this week Defence Minister Mark Lancaster also announced that the UK's main broadband providers including Virgin Media, Sky, Talk Talk, BT, EE and Plusnet, representing 95 per cent of Britain's broadband market, had committed to waiving fees on contracts that personnel had to cancel when posted abroad or to another part of the UK, often at short notice.

Since 2013, the Covenant has helped to deliver these key improvements for the Armed Forces community:

- A new agreement with mortgage lenders allowing personnel posted abroad to rent out their homes without facing higher mortgage costs or having to change their mortgage;
  - Fairer mobile phone contracts, freezing the accounts of Armed Forces personnel and their families posted overseas and removing cancellation fees;
  - Better deals in motor insurance, allowing personnel to keep their no claims bonuses and avoid cancellation fees when posted overseas at short notice;
  - Employer networks in a wide range of sectors to support Service leavers through their transition to new careers;
  - Better access to banking, such as savings accounts to Service families posted overseas;
  - Tackling commercial disadvantage previously experienced by the Armed Forces community in relation to credit rating and access to mortgages on offer. For example, if their Service overseas forces them into a situation where they will need to rent out their home, members are now free from the need to switch to a 'buy to let' mortgage;
  - Better access to mentoring, work placements and employment opportunities for personnel leaving the Services;
  - Increased funding and sponsorship of military charities and sports events such as the Invictus Games;
  - Flexible paid or unpaid leave for mobilised Reservists;
  - Employment support for Veterans, Reservists, Service spouses and partners, as well as support for Cadets;
- Discounts and special deals for individuals and their families.

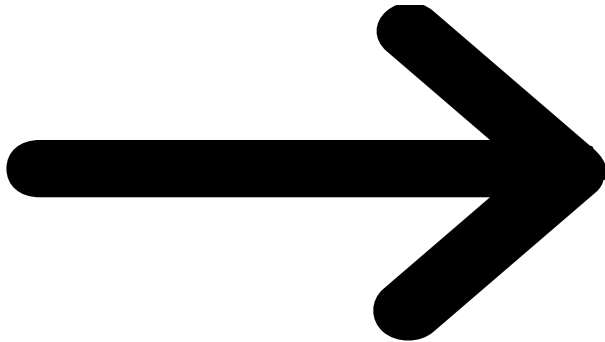
The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation, enshrined in law, ensuring that those who serve or have previously served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly and not disadvantaged by their service.

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# [SNP probed on ministers' indyref 'ring around'](#)

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14 Mar 2017



A series of parliamentary questions have been tabled to establish the extent of a Scottish Government minister “ring around” following Nicola Sturgeon’s referendum announcement.

It was reported today that ministers spent the day contacting companies and trade bodies to discuss the new break-up plans.

This is despite the SNP saying it is focused on the day job, and that areas like education and health are its “priority”.

According to reports, one recipient of a phone call said the minister in question was keen to “allay fears” surrounding a new vote, and that it might not happen until after Brexit was concluded.

On the same day, it emerged a school in education secretary John Swinney’s local area was appealing to parents to come in and help with maths tuition, such was the shortage of teachers.

And today, figures have revealed accident and emergency departments across the country – including at Scotland’s newest flagship hospital – continue to miss targets.

**Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:**

“This is a farcical use of government ministers’ time when they are supposed to be focused on the day job.

“Schools are having to ask parents to come in and fill teaching gaps, people are waiting too long at A&E and Police Scotland is in crisis.

“Yet the SNP thinks the best use of senior ministers’ time is to embark on a

ludicrous ring around of businesses to put down a marker on independence – surely more appropriately a job for SNP party apparatchiks?

“Nicola Sturgeon’s statement that her government’s priority is matters such as education is now exposed as a lie.

“The SNP should reveal exactly who spent time on these calls, who they were to, what was said, and exactly what the nationalists thought would be achieved by making them.”

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### **Reports of the ring around are here:**

<https://order-order.com/2017/03/14/snp-ring-around-played-down-referendum-chances/>

Below is a list of questions submitted today by Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont:

*TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

*TATSG to release all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

*TATSG to publish a record of all meetings between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

*TATSG to publish all minutes of discussions between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

*TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and financial organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

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*TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and the NHS, Royal Colleges and other medical stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

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*TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13*

March 2017.

*TATSG to publish all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

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*TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and charities and third sector stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.*

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## **News story: Joint Forces Command celebrates International Women's Day**

The special guest and keynote speaker for the event was Ambassador Marriet Schuurman, NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace, and Security.

JFC, which develops and manages the supporting frameworks for successful operations for joint forces in the UK and across the world, jointly hosted the event with NATO on Monday 6 March at its headquarters in Northwood, Middlesex.

The event was attended by approximately 100 people ranging from UK military, civil servants and defence contractors to military from NATO member countries. The key theme of the day was transformational management and

leadership.

During her keynote speech, Ambassador Marriet Schuurman spoke about the importance of gender equality. She said:

Gender equality for NATO is not optional; it is fundamental. It allows us to respond smarter and better to today's security challenges. Mixed teams perform better and smarter. Diversity is our strength.

The ambassador also referenced the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which recognises the disproportionate impact that war and conflict has on women and children. She said:

Resolution 1325 is an agenda for change, an agenda for sustainable peace and security by being inclusive.

She continued:

Every change process requires great leadership. Change always faces challenge and resistance. We must promote gender equality as a matter of effectiveness, and make it relevant for the security challenges of today.

Two panel discussions were also held to explore the themes of how leadership can be transformed and leadership challenges in a diverse culture with representatives from JFC, MOD and Foreign and Commonwealth Office leading the discussions.



A panel discussion at JFC's International Women's Day event on Monday 6 March 2017. Crown copyright. All rights reserved

Speaking during one of the panels, Vice Admiral Duncan Potts CB, Director General Joint Force Development and Defence Academy said:

Diversity and inclusion are very important because without a balanced number of women in our forces, we risk missing out on the skills and expertise of 50% of the population. It's really important that we get the right people into our services. And it's crucial that we reflect the values of the society we protect.

Andy Helliwell, Director of Resources and Policy, JFC said:

I am very proud that JFC is the first part of the MOD that has a more than 50% female civil servant workforce. We must strive to ensure that this continues and that we promote the benefits of diversity and inclusion to the wider MOD and indeed beyond other government departments.

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# SNP's new separation plans have 'unravelling within 24 hours'

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14 Mar 2017



The SNP's independence plans have "unravelling within 24 hours", the Scottish Conservatives have said today – amid total confusion over the SNP's stance on EU membership.

In interviews this morning, SNP ministers failed to spell out whether an independent Scotland would seek membership of the European Union.

It comes after Nicola Sturgeon was also unable to say whether an independent Scotland would apply for full EU membership in her press conference yesterday.

The Scottish Conservatives said the confusion only serves to underline the "reckless" proposal for a rushed referendum – which would force people to vote on "a pig in a poke".

It comes after senior EU figures made it clear yesterday that an independent Scotland would have to apply to become a member – even if an independence referendum was held before Britain left the EU.

This is also the view of leading experts who have said that an independent Scotland would have to apply as a new country to get into the EU after independence.

## **Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

"The SNP's plans to impose a referendum on independence on Scotland have unravelling within 24 hours.

"Nicola Sturgeon is demanding that people are forced to make another choice on their future in as little as 18 months. And yet faced with reasonable questions about what independence means, she and her ministers cannot answer.

"We know Scotland will leave the EU along with the rest of the United Kingdom in 2019. Yet the SNP can't say whether an independent Scotland would then seek full membership of the EU or not.

"This is the opposite of the informed choice proposed by Nicola Sturgeon. The truth is she wants people to vote blind because she calculates this is the best way to increase support for separation.

"The First Minister is proposing the opposite of a fair, democratic vote – she is demanding that people across Scotland vote on a pig in a poke.

"The SNP is trying to have it both ways.

"It is demanding a referendum because of our decision to leave the European Union. But, in order to keep Leave voters on board, it won't say whether Scotland would seek to get back in."□

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Below are transcripts from various SNP ministers on radio this morning:

*Studio:* You talk about clarity being very clear on that. How would an independent Scotland for example if it were to go that way, continue this relationship with Europe? Because that would surely mean a whole re-negotiation.

*Fiona Hyslop MSP:* Well, we have already set out a very comprehensive, technically detailed paper, how all of the UK could have a continuing relationship even outside the EU but continuing our relationship with the single market, so that is indeed possible. But in terms of the EU relationship future, much of course will depend on the views and opinions of our colleagues in the capitals and indeed the institutions of Europe. The European institutions are flexible and indeed the single market, the sheer size of that single market, means that a continued relationship is really important. The idea of having your very expensive customs tariffs in relation to our goods and services will be a problem for not just for Scottish business but for UK business. We want to make sure we can continue to trade with the biggest single market in the world and that is very important to us.

*Studio:* How would you continue that relationship? Presumably, you are imagining doing it, correct me if I am wrong, as an independent Scotland which would, as the rules are at the moment, mean a renegotiation.

*Fiona Hyslop MSP:* We are in a period of complete and utter renegotiation under Brexit. We do not know the terms of that. You are anticipating that I will know and anticipate what the exact details will be of our independence position, when we have the referendum, now that's sometime off and we want to make sure there's clarity on our independence position and our future relationship with the EU. A lot of it will depend on what state, what will be the state of the transition, if we get a transition from the UK Government in relation to exiting the EU, what will be the position of Scotland at the time the UK leaves? We want to make sure there is a choice before the UK leaves the EU and that is why we have that window of opportunity between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 but this has to be about choice. And that's what we want to offer the people of Scotland. We'll perhaps be the only part of the United Kingdom that can have a choice about whether this hard BREXIT deal is what we want or not

Nicola Sturgeon answer to Brian Taylor yesterday...

*Question (non-verbatim)* – are you assuming you can continue Scottish membership of the EU? If not, are you saying you'd definitely seek to re-join Scotland to full membership?

*Nicola Sturgeon:* What I'm saying today very clearly is that for Scotland to be in a position to **negotiate in a timely fashion our own relationship with Europe**, it's important that we indicate that desire and intention, before the UK leaves, or at the very least within a short timeframe after they do so. To leave it any longer than that would make that process more difficult. I do accept that that will be a process of discussion. **In terms of the second clause of your question, the SNP's long standing policy and commitment has been to membership of the European Union. Obviously we are in different circumstances now than we have been in the past, but that has been and remains our position. But on this issue, as on all of the many other issues that people will want to consider in advance of a choice, I've said very clearly that we will set out our proposition in advance of that choice so that it is an informed choice.**

...

*Question (non-verbatim)* – What reassurances do you have from other EU members that Scotland can be in or re-join?

*Nicola Sturgeon:* We have over the past 9 months been working very hard to influence the UK Government's negotiating position, and that has been partly as a result of some of the advice and feedback we've had from other countries across Europe, that if we wanted to seek a differential arrangement for Scotland then Europe would be open to that, but it had to come through the track of the UK Article 50 negotiations. So that has been our focus. Clearly we will continue to discuss with the other countries of the European Union and indeed with the institutions of the European Union. I know from my own experience across Europe that there is an incredible warmth of feeling towards Scotland, an incredible support, and a feeling that should Scotland democratically choose to be an independent country, then that is something that the EU would accept and respect and these discussions will continue no doubt in the months to come.

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## [Green Party Animal spokesperson welcomes vote to #EndTheCageAge for caged rabbits](#)



14 March 2017

**Keith Taylor MEP:** "This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens

**have always opposed factory farming and I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today's vote."**

Green Party Animals spokesperson Keith Taylor MEP is welcoming the vote to #EndTheCageAge for farmed rabbits across Europe. The MEP for the South East was among a majority of MEPs who voted to support a report calling for the practice to be outlawed at the European Parliament plenary session in [Strasbourg this afternoon](#). More than 4,000 people across the South East had contacted their MEPs calling for action.

Rabbits are the fourth most farmed animal in the world. An estimated 340 million rabbits are slaughtered annually after a life kept in barren wire cages where their natural behaviour is severely restricted. Many scientists have called for the cage system to be urgently replaced by one which allows for the natural needs of rabbits to be better taken into account.

The report adopted by MEPs calls for higher welfare standards for rabbits and concrete legislation that would ban the use of cages. Responding to the result, Keith said:

"This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens have always opposed factory farming and as the Green Party's Animals spokesperson I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today's vote. The report prioritises putting an end to the inhumane conditions in which rabbits are kept and eradicating the other problems associated intensive rabbit rearing. The current system leads to the spread of disease and the subsequent overuse of antibiotics."

"Rabbit farming is relatively small-scale in the UK, but the fact that the European Parliament has voted to end the cage age serves to highlight the key role EU membership has played and continues to play in raising the welfare of millions of farm animals in Britain and across the EU."

"The closer the relationship the UK maintains with the EU, retaining animal welfare and wildlife protections through single market membership, the better the outcome for British animals. Animal advocates across the UK must continue lobbying the UK government to ensure the current legal protections, for all species, offered by European Union membership are maintained and strengthened."

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