

Press release: Industrial Strategy on the agenda at latest Business Advisory Group

Today's session is the latest in a series of meetings that aim to provide a mechanism for businesses to engage with UK Government on a range of strategic economic issues and to provide UK Government with high level advice on critical business and economic issues facing Northern Ireland.

This afternoon's meeting was an opportunity for Minister Hopkins to encourage discussion on areas of particular resonance to Northern Ireland in relation to pillars one and four of the Industrial Strategy – investing in science, research and innovation and supporting businesses to start and grow – and to encourage the business groups present to respond to the consultation. It also allowed the minister to provide assurance that the Government is committed to political stability and urge members to use their influence to encourage political parties to deliver a functioning and effective Executive post-election.

Speaking after the meeting, Kris Hopkins MP said:

The Industrial Strategy is a vital part of this Government's plan to drive growth across the whole United Kingdom and create more high skilled, high paid jobs and opportunities. New Sector Deals and investment in research and development will support the industries of the future where the UK – and Northern Ireland in particular – has the potential to lead the world.

Both the Secretary of State and I will continue to explore how to maximise the positive impact that this Strategy can have in Northern Ireland, particularly in exploring Sector Deals, removing barriers to innovation and growth and developing new trade and investment deals to increase exports.

Today's session also provided an opportunity to stress the need for political stability as a fundamental basis for industrial success. Securing strong, stable devolved institutions in Northern Ireland that will provide leadership, support innovation and boost skills will be vital to delivering on Northern Ireland's potential as a place to invest and do business as we continue to build an economy that works for everyone.

Today's meeting was attended by the following:

John Cunningham, Camlin Group
Peter Cunningham, Camlin Group
Linda Brown, Institute of Directors
Ian Sheppard, Institute of Directors/Bank of Ireland
Wilfred Mitchell, Federation of Small Businesses
Roger Pollen, Federation of Small Businesses
John Friel, Federation of Small Businesses
Angela McGowan, Confederation of British Industry
Nick Coburn, Northern Ireland Chamber
Chris Morrow, Northern Ireland Chamber
Professor Paddy Johnston, QUB Vice-Chancellor
Professor Paddy Nixon, UU Vice-Chancellor
Liam Nagle, Norbrook
Nick Wheelan, Dale Farm
Shaun McAnee, Danske Bank
Lynsey Cunningham, Ulster Bank
Joanne Stuart, Catalyst NI

Speech: British High Commissioner welcomes returning Zambian Chevening scholars

Speaking at the event, which was also attended by the Zambian Minister of Higher Education Prof. Nkandu Luo, Mr Cochrane-Dyet said:

I am delighted to be hosting this event to welcome the 17 Zambians who went to study at prestigious British universities. I also welcome the Chevening alumni who are already making a difference in Zambia through their respective positions and activities they are carrying out in their communities.

I am always interested when meeting Zambians who have studied and lived in the UK to find out how they coped with the cultural differences. Take British understatement, for example, and irony. Anyone going to Britain for the first time needs to know that when they hear someone preface a remark with "With the greatest respect" they do not mean "I think highly of you", not at all, what they really mean is "I think you are completely wrong." Or someone might respond to an observation you make by saying "how very interesting". Do they really mean that they have been inspired by your sparkling intellect or do they actually mean that they think you have been talking nonsense? And if you hear a British person say "I agree with you up to a point", be in no doubt that an accurate translation would be "I am too polite to say so but I think you might be mad".

For many years now, the UK has been working alongside Zambia to develop young leaders and support the self-development of individuals who want to make positive change in their communities, workplaces and their country. The British High Commission aims to build lasting relationships between people in the UK and Zambia, and increase the appreciation of what the UK has to offer and what we have achieved – together.

Chevening and its predecessor schemes have been operating in Zambia since 1985. To date, over 230 Zambians have studied in the UK under it. Chevening is the UK's flagship scholarship scheme administered in Zambia by the Association of Commonwealth Universities on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I hope to see more Zambians study in the UK, now that we have expanded our Chevening Scholarship scheme here from two places in 2015 to 17 in 2016. We are in the process of organising interviews for the scores of Zambians who have applied for Chevening scholarships in various fields of study for the 2017/2018 academic year. I wish them luck.

Chevening Scholarships are an important element of the British Government's programme to promote greater capacity for the next generation of Zambian leaders and to further develop the excellent relationship between Zambia and the UK. Improved relations are in the interests of all of us. At the risk of flattering many of you, these Scholarships are for talented people who have been identified as potential future leaders across a wide range of fields, including politics, business, the media, civil society, religion, and academia.

Let me tell you a fact. Did you know that of all the kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers across the world, all those currently serving, one-in-seven of them have studied in the UK? Britain continues to offer among the best educational institutions in the world – schools as well as universities. And many influential Zambians have benefited from that experience. The idea of the Chevening scheme is to expand that further, two examples being Justice Florence Lengalenga, High Court Judge, and Chibamba Kanyama, former Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Director General and now working for the International Monetary Fund.

I am certain that the 17 returning students will join the list of Zambian Chevening Alumni who are using their skills and knowledge to contribute significantly to Zambia's development.

I am glad that the Alumni are doing some good works already. For instance, they contributed to Zambia's elections last year by hosting a public debate for candidates who were vying for the Mayoral seat in Lusaka. Candidates, who included the current Mayor, Mr Wilson Kalumba, had the opportunity to sell themselves to the electorate. The Alumni also participated in the inaugural "Race to Beat Cancer" which was organised by PricewaterhouseCoopers Limited Zambia to raise awareness about the disease. You Alumni have helped to mentor and encourage potential candidates to apply for Chevening scholarships. You have also assisted with interviews for Chevening applicants. I look forward to seeing more of such activities, and would like to hear your ideas.

Finally, being educated at a British university can have unexpected rewards. I speak from experience. In 1983 I matriculated at Jesus College, Oxford University, but chose to leave after an unhappy affair of the heart. I went travelling instead, worked at a school in Kenya, and decided that I wanted to devote my life to working with Africa and Africans.

Subsequently, I returned to my studies at Durham University. However, after my unhappy experiences at Oxford, I chose an all-male college so that I could avoid women for a while and thus avoid romantic entanglements. What I did not know was that after I had been accepted, the college deviously decided to introduce women for the first time with an initial intake of twenty young ladies. Arriving at the college on that sunny October morning nearly 33 years ago, the first other student that I saw was an attractive girl in a blue beret. Ladies and gentlemen, that student's name was Susie, and she became my wife shortly afterwards. An unexpected benefit from my university education.

Thank you for listening.

I would now like to conclude by presenting certificates to the returning scholars.

[The underinvestment in infrastructure spending in the north is totally unacceptable – Andy McDonald](#)

Andy

McDonald MP, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, commenting on an IPPR report which shows underinvestment in transport in the north, said:

"The underinvestment in infrastructure spending in the north is totally unacceptable. We need to ensure economic growth is spread beyond just London and the South East. Having a balanced economy is good for the UK as a whole but

the Government seem determined to invest in London at the expense of the rest of country.

“It’s short-term thinking that means our regions are starved of investment when they have so much potential for growth, and it shines a light on the Government’s self-defeating economic strategy which says that meeting the transport needs of London should come at the expense of our regions.

“Labour would make sure that the transport needs of the South-East are met whilst rebalancing the economy and making the necessary investment in transport infrastructure right across the UK, including prioritising a CrossRail for the North to improve connectivity between our Northern cities.”

Welsh Government investing £2.5m to build new facility for Qioptiq in support of its new £82m contract

Work will now commence immediately on the new 24,900 sq. ft. facility that the Welsh Government will construct on land it owns adjacent to Qioptiq’s premises on St Asaph Business Park. It will provide secure warehousing and manufacturing space to enable Qioptiq to achieve full operating capacity to deliver the MoD contract within the required timescale. Qioptiq will be investing cf2m in fit out and IT systems.

Ken Skates said:

“Winning this major contract is hugely significant for Qioptiq and for North Wales. Qioptiq is one of our key Anchor companies working in a priority sector and is one of the most dynamic and innovative companies in Wales.

“I am delighted the Welsh Government was able to support the company’s successful bid from the early pre qualification stage through to the development of a purpose designed facility that is vital to deliver the contract.

“This new contract secures the long term future of the company in St Asaph where it has a significant economic impact on the local economy through expenditure by employees and through local supply

chains. It is another high value manufacturing company whose future has been secured by the work of Welsh Government."

Peter White, Managing Director at Qioptiq said

"We are delighted to have received this major contract from UK MOD to support equipment vital to the safety of our soldiers in front line operations. The support from Welsh Government and the hard work, capability and commitment of our employees were the key factors in our success. We look forward to continuing the successful relationship we have with UK MoD and supporting our troops with this important contract."

Under the new six year contract Qioptiq will supply and maintain a large range of Surveillance and Target Acquisition equipment for the MoD. The company specialises in the design and manufacture of optical and photonic products and solutions that serve a wide range of markets and applications in areas of defence, aerospace, medial and life sciences and industrial manufacturing.

It is a recognised, first-tier supplier to many of the defence and aerospace sector's leading companies with a product range that includes some of the most sophisticated advanced optical technologies ranging from Night Vision Sights, to Head Up Display Optical modules, through to Space Components

Qioptiq is part of the US owned Excelitas Group which has a worldwide presence with locations throughout Europe, Asia and the USA employing more than 5000 people. It employs over 500 people in North Wales on two sites at St Asaph and Bodelwyddan.

[Long-Bailey writes to Greg Clark to demand guarantee of jobs for Vauxhall workforce](#)

Shadow

Business Secretary, Rebecca Long-Bailey, writes to Greg Clark about potential sale of Vauxhall to Peugeot-PSA

The

Shadow Secretary for BEIS has today written to Greg Clark, Secretary of State for BEIS, urging him to guarantee that jobs and terms and conditions of the Vauxhall workforce will be protected in the event of the company's sale to

Peugeot-PSA.

Rebecca

Long-Bailey has also requested an Urgent Question on the matter in the House of Commons, which will be taken at 3.30 today.

On

the threat the proposed takeover poses to the UK workforce, Rebecca Long-Bailey said:

"These reports are deeply worrying to the 4,500 workers employed at Vauxhall's Luton and Ellesmere Port plants, and to the tens of thousands of employees in its retail, support and supply chain operations. PSA's history of axing jobs in the name of rationalisation are also concerning. Britain's automotive industry has become a world-leader by developing its skilled and highly-committed workforce and becoming more productive, not by ruthlessly driving down costs."

On

the implications of the proposal for the Government's industrial strategy, Rebecca Long-Bailey said:

"a piecemeal, ad hoc approach will see our automotive sector lurch from crisis to crisis as the uncertainties created by Brexit begin to take their toll. Waiting for car makers to go to the brink before offering them support is the very antithesis of an industrial strategy."

On

the need to give workers in the UK the same protections given to European counterparts, Rebecca Long-Bailey said:

"failure to provide equivalent Government support to Opel's UK sites as that seen in France and Germany, and to ensure full parity of treatment between Opel's UK and French workers would be a betrayal of the UK workforce."

Ends

Editors' notes

– It has recently emerged that General Motors is discussing the sale of Opel, which includes Vauxhall, to PSA Group.

– 4,500

workers are employed at Vauxhall's Luton and Ellesmere port plants, along with tens of thousands more who are employed in the retail, support and supply chain operations.

– These

jobs are under threat from the proposed sale, should Vauxhall cut back production, a particular concern given the PSA Group has a reputation for cutting jobs to rationalise production.

– The

French Government owns a 14% stake in PSA and the German government is providing financial support to its Opel sites.

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The full text of the letter is as follows:

Dear

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP,

I

am writing to request an urgent meeting to discuss reports that General Motors may be about to sell its European business, Opel, to PSA, the owner of Peugeot and Citroen brands.

These

reports are deeply worrying to the 4,500 workers employed at Vauxhall's Luton and Ellesmere Port plants, and to the tens of thousands of employees in its retail, support and supply chain operations. PSA's history of axing jobs in the name of rationalisation are also concerning. Britain's automotive industry has become a world-leader by developing its skilled and highly-committed workforce and becoming more productive, not by ruthlessly driving down costs.

I

understand that you met with PSA executives on 16th February and that the Prime Minister is due to meet PSA CEO Carlos Taveres shortly. I am keen to hear in detail what assurances they were able to give you about their plans for Vauxhall, and what you and your Government are doing to ensure that PSA do not turn their backs on Opel's UK workforce.

Like

you, I welcomed Nissan's decision late last year to continue to invest in the

UK, but argued at the time that all car manufacturers should be given the same assurances. Recent developments have underlined this point. It was reported over the weekend that PSA have now been given the same guarantees, but I remain concerned that a piecemeal, ad hoc approach will see our automotive sector lurch from crisis to crisis as the uncertainties created by Brexit begin to take their toll. Waiting for car makers to go to the brink before offering them support is the very antithesis of an industrial strategy.

This is particularly so given that the French Government owns a 14% stake in PSA. In light of predictions by analysts and industry experts that French workers will be left unscathed by any buy-out, and that job losses will fall elsewhere, including in the UK, it is hard not to worry that the British Government's hands-off approach is letting workers down. Even the German Government is providing financial support to its Opel sites, and workers in Germany are much harder to sack than those in the UK. Under such circumstances, failure to provide equivalent Government support to Opel's UK sites as that seen in France and Germany, and to ensure full parity of treatment between Opel's UK and French workers would be a betrayal of the UK workforce.

In the longer run, it is clear that the Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper launched last month has done little to reassure manufacturers weighing up whether or not to stay in the UK after we leave the European Union. Urgent action is needed to encourage the reshoring of manufacturing supply chains and secure single market access for key exporting industries. Without this, there is a real danger that many of our finest manufacturers will fall victim to new import and export tariffs.

The next few days will be critical in determining the future of Vauxhall in the UK. I would therefore be most grateful if you would agree to meet me as a matter of urgency to discuss what action you are taking to protect the jobs and terms and conditions of Opel's UK workforce. It may also be welcome to involve those MP's representing areas directly affected by this issue in our discussions for example those members representing Luton and Ellesmere Port.

Yours

sincerely,

Rebecca
Long-Bailey

Shadow
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy