

# [BCC comments on labour market statistics for March 2017](#)

Head of Economics, Suren Thiru, comments on the labour market statistics published today.

15th March 2017

**Commenting on the labour market statistics for March 2017, published today by the Office for National Statistics, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:**

“The UK’s jobs market is going from strength to strength, with the number of people in work continuing to rise and unemployment also falling.

“UK labour market conditions may cool over the next few years as the expected slowdown in growth and the rising burden of upfront business costs stifle firms’ hiring intentions. That said, we expect that the UK unemployment rate will reach a peak of 5.3% next year, still some way below the historical average.

“However, average pay growth continues to slow, and it appears increasingly likely that inflation will outstrip earnings growth in the coming months, which will put further pressure on consumer’s spending power.

“With Article 50 set to be triggered shortly, it is vital that more is done to provide greater clarity and stability for firms, including certainty on the residence rights of their existing EU workers, and clarity on the regime for hiring from EU countries during the negotiation period. Further action is also needed to ease the burden of upfront costs and taxes of doing business in the UK, which limit companies’ ability to invest and grow.”

**Ends**

**Notes to editors:**

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: [www.britishchambers.org.uk](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk)

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## Ministers urgently need to come up with credible and comprehensive strategy to minimise prevalence of lung diseases – Sharon Hodgson

### **Sharon**

**Hodgson MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Public Health**, reacting to the British Lung Foundation's report into the economic cost of lung disease in the UK, said:

"Lung disease is a major health issue here in our country. The British Lung Foundation's eye-opening report today is an important step in highlighting the staggering and rising cost of this illness. There is not only a financial toll for our society but for the NHS as well. It is so important that we do all we can to address the various lung-related illnesses and diseases that people face and make inroads into improving respiratory health.

"Ministers urgently need to come up with a credible and comprehensive strategy to minimise the prevalence of lung diseases in our country, and also to reduce the costs of this illness on our society and our already stretched NHS.

"The cost of lung disease in the UK is getting worse by the year and this enormous human and financial impact just can't be allowed to continue. The Government must be much more proactive in raising awareness among the public and investing in preventative health measures which can head off the risks of lung disease in years to come."

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# Friends of Wighton update

With thanks to Sheena Wellington, here's the latest update from Friends of Wighton :

Wighton Heritage Centre, Central Library – Saturday 18th March at 11am  
(doors open 10.30am)



**Cappuccino Concert with singer/songwriter Bob Knight**

Bob Knight is a singer from Aberdeen who has slowly but surely been making a name for himself in the world of folk and traditional music. He comes from a long line of traditional singers and musicians, and is related to many of the great traditional singers from North East Scotland.

He is well known in North East Scotland folk circles as a singer and writer of songs in traditional style, having performed at most of the local clubs, and festivals, including many events at Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute.

Bob doesn't just confine himself to his home patch though, and has played all over Scotland, including Edinburgh Folk club, The Scottish Storytelling Centre, (Edinburgh) The Rolling Hills Folk Festival in Melrose, the Portsoy Boat Festival, Dougie McLean's Perthshire Amber festival, and Celtic Connections in Glasgow. In August 2012 and then again in 2013, he performed in a series of highly successful concerts at the prestigious Whitby Folk Week, in Yorkshire.

In August 2013, Bob released his second CD, "Songs From My Tradition," this time ringing the changes by recording Scottish traditional unaccompanied songs. Future projects include another CD, of Scottish folk favourites, "Fields Of Home," recorded with his brother Willie Knight, and the eagerly awaited third solo album, which will feature Bob's best known and requested original songs.

Tickets £5 at door. Tea/coffee available for small donation.

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## Giant panda to return home as she feels the effects of age



Keeper Liu Jiang feeds Shu Lan at a zoo in the northwestern city of Lanzhou. The 23-year-old giant panda, who is 70 in human terms, is to be returned to her hometown in Sichuan Province. [Photo/Xinhua]

A 23-year-old panda living in a zoo in the northwestern city of Lanzhou is to return to its hometown in southwest China's Sichuan Province due to its age, zoo authorities said yesterday.

Shu Lan was born in Chengdu, Sichuan's capital, and moved to Lanzhou in 1996.

In 1999, she went back to Sichuan to live in Chengdu and two giant panda centers in the city of Ya'an for research and breeding.

The panda returned to Lanzhou in April last year, but her health aroused public concern after photographs of her with an injured back and foaming at the mouth went viral.

The China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda sent three experts to Lanzhou earlier this month to evaluate her health and the living conditions at Lanzhou Zoo.

They found that Shu Lan's health was normal and determined that the foaming at the mouth was caused mainly by chewing and playing with her tongue. But they also pointed out that her weight had dropped from 103 kilograms to 92kg

since she had returned to the city, though that was still in the normal range.

However, they also concluded that Shu Lan was showing symptoms of aging.

Giant pandas live mainly in the mountains of northern Sichuan as well as the southern parts of Gansu and Shaanxi provinces.

According to the latest nationwide survey, there are 132 giant pandas in the wild in southern Gansu.

But Lanzhou, in the middle of the province, has a different environment and climate compared with wild panda habitats.

Heating, air conditioning and a humidifier have been installed in Shu Lan's living area in the zoo. But the panda habitat was built in 1976 and is now deemed too antiquated for her.

The bamboo she was fed was not fresh enough as it was transported from central China's Henan Province. In addition, the zoo lacks experience in taking care of old pandas.

Experts suggested sending Shu Lan to the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda in Sichuan to help maintain her health.

That suggestion has been approved by the zoo, though a specific schedule has not yet been released.

The decision was confirmed by Zhang Jianlong, head of the State Forestry Administration.

"We will try our best to improve the condition of the zoo," said Lei Qinghai, its director, adding that the city is planning to move the zoo to a new site for future development.

A national survey released in February 2015 showed that by the end of 2013, China had 1,864 wild pandas and 375 others living in captivity.

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## [Peter Dowd speech at the close of tonight's Budget debates](#)

**Peter Dowd MP, Labour's Shadow**

**Chief Secretary to the Treasury**, speaking at the close of the Budget debates tonight, said:

Mr Speaker, last week the Chancellor painted a rosy picture of the

nation's finances.

He claimed the Conservative Party's stewardship had been nothing short of miraculous.

A relaxed Chancellor attempted jokes throughout his speech.

The Prime Minister shoulders shook with amusement.

Many members opposite chuckled away.

Some of the more experienced Members opposite were watching cautiously, as the nose dive gained velocity.

The Chancellor got it wrong – big time.

Within hours he was attacked by many of his own backbenchers.

He was left hung out to dry by the Prime Minister.

Unsurprisingly, he has faced universal criticism over his plans to raise national insurance to 11 per cent for millions of people who are self-employed.

As Sir Michael Caine, playing the character of Charlie Crooker in the iconic Italian Job movie said to his bumbling side kick.

"You're only supposed to blow the doors off!"

Well, the debris from the explosion is still in descending.

A manifesto pledge broken – pure and simple.

And since last Wednesday No.10 and No. 11 have been in a briefing war with each trying to blame the other for the fine mess.

Ostensibly, No.10 suggests the Chancellor sneaked the NI rise into the Budget.

Apparently, other shocked Cabinet

colleagues have indicated that he failed to mention, that it would break their manifesto pledge.

It's worrying, Mr Speaker, that Cabinet Ministers don't know what manifesto commitments they made or perhaps they don't care?

Then again the Government has an insouciant attitude towards its manifesto commitments.

First, the Government committed to getting rid of the deficit by 2015 – a promise broken.

Second, they said it would be pushed back to 2019/20 – another broken promise.

Third, they vowed the debt would start to come down after 2015 – another broken promise.

The Government will have virtually doubled the debt and doubled the time they'll have taken to get it down.

And this is what they call success and fiscal credibility?

They seem to think that they can simply press the reset button when it comes to meeting their own fiscal rules and no one will notice.

The flip side of John Maynard Keynes' approach, namely when I change my mind the facts change with it.

When the Government's misses a deadline it's modus operandi is to set a new one and brazenly move on.

The immutable Tory law of economics – make it up as you go along.

What happened to the long term economic plan?

Well, it didn't last very long? Mr Speaker

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have their finger prints all over every single financial decision that has been made during the last seven years.

It's no surprise that they have come under criticism from many in their own party including the former Member for Witney.

Or the former Chancellor, Lord Lamont, who called the NI debacle a "rookie error".

Otherwise known, in the real world, as gross incompetence.

But regrettably it's other people who will pay the price for that incompetence.

Mr Speaker, turning to Brexit, I'll mention it even if the Chancellor doesn't, it's the tenth anniversary since the production of

"Freeing Britain to Compete: Equipping the UK for Globalisation"

This publication was a wide ranging policy document authored by the right honourable Member for Wokingham and friends.

It was endorsed by the then Shadow Cabinet which included the current incumbents at numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street.

The publication was hard to track down as it has been removed from the Conservative Party website and for good reason.

But I found a copy.

Its contents were toxic and all the more so in the wake of the subsequent global financial crisis and remain so.

But in the light of Brexit, and the resurgence of the honourable member for Wokingham's influence, it will soon be getting a second run out.

Mr Speaker, it is worth appraising the House of a few of the nuggets contained in its pages.

It includes policies such as the abolition of inheritance tax.

Charging foreign lorries to use British roads.

The potential abolition of the BBC licence fee, which it refers to as a poll tax.

The watering down of money laundering regulations.



The deregulation of mortgage finance.

Because it's the:

"lending institutions rather than the client taking the risk."

Try telling that to someone whose house has been repossessed.

It goes on:

"we need to make it more difficult for ministers to regulate, and we need to give the critics of regulation more opportunity to make their case against specific new proposals."

Remember this document, dated August 2007, was rubber stamped by the current Prime Minister and Chancellor at the same time Northern Rock was about to go under.

It continues:

"the Government (the Labour Government) claims that this regulation is all necessary. They seem to believe that without it banks could steal our money."

That is not quite the case but the taxpayer, at its peak, had liabilities for the banking crisis of £1.2 trillion.

But, Mr Speaker, many people did believe the banks were stealing their money.

It refers to wanting:

"reliably low inflation, taking no risks by turning fiscal rules into flexible friends."

As for Europe, in search of jobs and prosperity, it says:

"An incoming Conservative Government should go to Brussels with proposals to deregulate the whole EU..."

No wonder they wanted to bury the evidence.

It's the autobiography of the hard line Brexiteers.

It's the Tory blue print for a post Brexit deregulated Britain.

It's a race to the bottom.

These policies are a telling narrative of the views of the fundamentalist wing of the Conservative Party.

The Prime Minister is a hostage to the far right of the Tory Party.

She is on the hook.

The stage directions are coming from Wokingham, Haltemprice and Howden, North Somerset and Chingford and Wood Green with occasional guest appearances by the Foreign Secretary.

The forlorn, melancholic Chancellor is briefed against because he may just have a less hard-line outlook as far as Brexit is concerned.

These are the dusted off policies of the hard Brexiteers who will stop at nothing until Britain becomes a low wage, low tax, low regulation economy.

They want to turn our country into the bargain basement of the western world.

They have the Prime Minister in tow.

Parliamentary scrutiny is a hindrance.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has put Kamikaze pilots in the cockpit.

The Chancellor knows this too well and that is why reportedly he is putting aside £60 billion, equivalent to a year's worth of borrowing on the national debt to cope with the trauma.

It's not Brexit proofing the economy but rather proofing the economy from the toxic ideology of the hard Brexiteers.

Mr Speaker, ultimately, it comes down to choices and values.

The Government's choices in this Budget are informed by their values and they are not the same as the vast majority of people in this country.

The Government propose to increase Insurance Premium Tax from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, a regressive measure which will be a further hit on household finances and act as a deterrent to families wanting to obtain proper insurance cover.

It was a surprise to see this measure in the Autumn Statement, coming as it did from a government which constantly uses the high cost of insurance premiums as an excuse for curbs on victims' right to claim compensation for their losses, with particularly damaging effects for those injured in accidents at work.

We will oppose this rise.

And while the Government drives up insurance price for millions of families, it has chosen to forego £73 billion of revenue to give corporations and the wealthy few tax handouts between now and 2021.

A choice we would not make.

Their choice is informed by the value they put on elites and corporations, many of whom readily avoid paying their fair share of tax.

They plan to loosen the rules on the Business Investment Relief, increasing the scope for non-doms to avoid tax when they bring funds into the UK.

This is straightforwardly a giveaway to non-doms, which we will oppose.

There is little evidence that this relief has had a significant impact on inward investment since it was first introduced in 2012.

And there is little genuine reason to believe that expanding the relief now will do anything but give non-doms even more advantages over millions of UK taxpayers.

These and other tax cuts for elites and corporations come off the backs of public sector employees who have foregone pay rises for years.

Or those in the private sector whose wages and salaries remain in the doldrums and will for another decade or more.

Or the self-employed who are increasingly driving our economy who will see an increase to 11 per cent in National Insurance contributions.

We would make a different choice.  
We reject the kick in the teeth to self-employed people.

Not only does it hit many on low to middle income but will it raise anywhere near the £2 billion the Treasury projects?

It may also deter many people from setting up their own businesses, from innovating and excelling.

It's a moratorium on aspiration.

We would choose not to give tax breaks to those who do not need them.

Mr Speaker, in this Budget the Government claims it's giving lower and middle earners, the NHS, social care agencies, the self-employed, schools, businesses, pubs, the strivers, the entrepreneurs the thumbs up.

Mr Speaker, in practice, this Budget is not giving a thumbs up to all those people.

On the contrary, it's two other digits being put up to those people.

That's another choice that Labour would not make.