

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.

Green Party Animal spokesperson welcomes vote to #EndTheCageAge for caged rabbits



Green Party

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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BCC Economic Forecast: UK growth upgraded for 2017 but to remain flat in the medium-term

Today the BCC releases its latest latest economic forecast.

14th March 2017

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) has today (Tuesday) upgraded its UK GDP growth forecast for 2017 from 1.1% to 1.4%. However, it has downgraded its expectations slightly for 2018 from 1.4% to 1.3%, and published its first forecast for 2019 of 1.5% growth.

The leading business group upgraded its growth forecast for 2017, driven by an upward revision to UK GDP growth data in the final quarter of 2016, and stronger than expected levels of consumer spending. There has also been a slight improvement in the outlook for investment and trade, compared to our previous forecast.

However, economic growth is expected to remain well below its long-term average over the forecast period.

Inflation is forecast to breach the Bank of England's 2% target this quarter, with companies facing higher input costs, which will be passed through to consumers. While average earnings are expected to hold steady, the inflationary pressures are likely to erode real wages. As a result, consumer spending, a driving force of growth in the economy in recent years, is expected to slow substantially.

The UK's net trade position is expected to improve over the next few years. Investment is forecast to contract this year, with subdued growth predicted in the following years, as uncertainties relating to the outcomes of the UK's negotiations with the EU persist, and increasing input costs and taxes hit businesses.

In this period of uncertainty, there are heightened risks to the forecast. Faster levels of inflation and increased anxiety around the Brexit negotiations could result in more muted growth, however if resilience in consumer spending continues, growth levels could be bolstered.

Key points in the forecast:

- **UK GDP growth forecast for 2017 is upgraded to 1.4%, but is expected to slow to 1.3% in 2018, before accelerating slightly to 1.5% in 2019. Growth of 0.4% is expected in Q1 2017**
- **The improved growth forecast for 2017 is driven primarily by stronger than expected household consumption and ONS revisions to Q4 GDP data. GDP growth forecast for 2018 has been downgraded slightly from 1.4% to 1.3%, with consumer spending expected to weaken**
- **The pace of inflation has picked up faster than expected and is forecast to breach the Bank of England's 2% target early this year, growing by 2.4% in 2017, 2.7% in 2018 before slowing to 2.5% in 2019.** This is higher than the previous forecast of 2.1% and 2.4% for 2017 and 2018 respectively
- **Consumer spending is expected to slow substantially from 1.6% in 2017, to 0.9% in 2018 and 1.1% in 2019** as inflationary pressures erode real wages
- **Business investment is expected to contract by 0.5% in 2017, before growth levels of 0.2% in 2018 and 1.0% in 2019**
- **Export growth** has been upgraded from 2.3% to 2.7% in 2017, and from 2.9% to 3.1% in 2018, and is expected to be 2.8% in 2019.
- Looking at sectors, **construction** has been upgraded from -2.0% for 2017 to 0.4% and is expected to grow by 0.2% in 2018 and 1.0% in 2019. The **services sector** is expected to grow by 1.9% in 2017, 1.5% in 2018 and 1.7% in 2019. **Manufacturing** is to grow by 1.2%, 0.7% and 1.0% respectively.
- The main downside risk to our forecast is if inflation rises by more than we currently predict which would be a further squeeze on consumer spending and business investment. The upside risk is if consumer spending current resilience continues. Under this scenario, our expectations for GDP growth would be substantially higher.

Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the BCC, said:

"Thanks to the hard work of businesses and the continued resilience of the redoubtable British consumer, the U.K. economy is likely to grow somewhat more strongly than we'd previously expected during 2017.

"Yet with several years of unspectacular growth ahead, coupled with inflationary pressures and the uncertain outcome of Brexit negotiations, it has never been more important to tackle the long-standing constraints that

limit business confidence and growth here at home.

“Last week’s Budget was a missed opportunity for the government to double down on infrastructure improvements and support for international trade, and to lower the heavy up-front taxes and costs that undermine business investment. More thoughtful and radical moves to improve the business environment would give businesses – and GDP forecasts – a boost during a critical and complex time.”

Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the BCC, said:

“We have upgraded our growth forecast for 2017, driven by revisions to official GDP data and a stronger than expected end to 2016 for the UK economy.

“That said, the UK economy is still set to enter a more subdued period, with growth expected to remain materially below trend over the near term. The resilience in consumer spending, a key driver of UK growth, will slowly dissipate over the coming months as higher inflation and muted wage growth combine to erode consumer spending power.

“The UK’s trade position will improve across the forecast period supported by the depreciation of Sterling and an improving outlook for the global economy.

“The imbalances in the economy continue to leave the UK increasingly exposed to economic shocks. While household consumption’s contribution to UK GDP growth is likely to decrease over the near term, the slight improvement in investment and trade prospects over the same period is not expected to be enough to prevent a slowdown in overall growth.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

As with all economic forecasts, further material changes to our forecast are possible.

Dr Adam Marshall, Director General, and Suren Thiru, Head of Economics, are available for interview.

A full copy of the forecast is available from the BCC press office.

The British Chambers of Commerce’s Quarterly Economic Forecast is run in partnership with Cambridge Econometrics.

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

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[News story: Veterans UK Customer Satisfaction Survey 2017](#)

At Veterans UK (part of Defence Business Services) we are always trying to improve the services we deliver to our customers. One of the best ways to understand how we can make improvements is to ask the people who use our services how we can do better.

If you would like to tell us about your experiences, please complete our [Customer Satisfaction Survey 2017](#)

For more information on the services we deliver and how you can contact us, please see [Veterans UK](#).

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13 Mar 2017



Nicola Sturgeon's decision to hold another independence referendum has been branded "utterly irresponsible" by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson.

Earlier today the First Minister announced she wanted to hold a second independence referendum next year.

This is despite previously saying she would only do so if the majority of Scots wanted another vote, and that it was a “once in a generation” decision.

Repeated polling has shown not only opposition to independence, but widespread objection to another referendum.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Nicola Sturgeon has today given up acting as First Minister for all of Scotland.

“People have said time and again they do not want to go back to the division of a second referendum.

“Nicola Sturgeon promised the 2014 referendum would be ‘once in a generation’.

“Today she has ignored the majority in Scotland who do not want a referendum and has decided instead to double down on division and uncertainty.

“The First Minister’s proposal offers Scotland the worst of all worlds. Her timetable would force people to vote blind on the biggest political decision a country could face.

“This is utterly irresponsible and has been taken by the First Minister purely for partisan political reasons.

“Both No and Yes voters have been urging her to put this to one side – but because of her own rash decision to use Brexit in a bid to lever support for independence, she has ignored them completely.

“Quite simply, today the First Minister has failed in her job to act in the interests of all of us.”