

## UK employment continues to grow to new record levels

The UK has 302,000 more jobs than a year ago, in today's employment figures. There are 2.7m more jobs than in 2010. The UK's employment rate, at 75%, is around the German level, and well above France at 65% and Italy at 57%.

I doubt we will hear these figures on the main news bulletins. All those who tell me a country has to be in the single market to prosper, have to explain two inconvenient facts. Why are Greece, Portugal, Spain and other countries in the single market so cursed with mass unemployment? Why do countries like New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Singapore and the USA flourish with low unemployment by EU standards whilst not being in the single market?

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## News story: NATO must improve agility and spend, Defence Secretary urges

Sir Michael Fallon is pressing NATO members to step up defence spending during a two-day defence ministerial at NATO's HQ in Brussels, following his first meeting with US Defense Secretary James Mattis.

Reflecting the strength of the UK-US Defence relationship, Sir Michael was the first minister Secretary Mattis called after his appointment and their hour-long meeting at NATO's HQ was the first bilateral working session today.

During their recent phone call, shortly after Secretary Mattis' confirmation, both ministers agreed on the need for NATO to be more agile and responsive so it can respond faster to new threats including cyber and terrorism.

In July NATO confirmed that the UK meets the two per cent spending target, which includes a £178bn equipment plan and rising defence spending every year of this parliament.

The Defence Secretary spoke to fellow ministers to call for other states to spend both 2% overall and to spend 20% of that on new equipment to help tackle threats.

In his face-to-face meetings with Secretary Mattis Sir Michael reassured him that the UK stands shoulder to shoulder with the US in calling for NATO to be more agile to meet new threats in the fields of cyber warfare and counter terrorism.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

NATO has been a guarantee of mutual security for more than half a century. Britain is now calling for our partners to step up and share burdens on spending and help it become more agile in dealing with new threats including cyber and terrorism.

As leading player in the Alliance we recognise the importance of backing up our operational and exercise commitments with investment in new equipment to deal with threats to our security.

Sir Michael is discussing the UK's leadership in NATO. The UK's Enhanced Forward Presence deployment to Estonia is gathering momentum, seen this week in a 600-strong exercise in Sennelager in Germany which features British personnel from the Battle Group for 5 RIFLES. Hundreds of British troops including 5 RIFLES personnel from Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire have spent the last week exercising with four Challenger II tanks, Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicles and Jackals – alongside Estonian, French and Danish troops.

The deployment of 800 British personnel to Estonia under EFP is part of a package of measures that the UK is leading in NATO this year. These include leading the land element of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force with 3,000 British troops ready to deploy rapidly to threats wherever they arise in the Alliance, and committing RAF Typhoon aircraft to the NATO Southern Air Policing mission to offer reassurance to in the Black Sea region.

Over the two-day ministerial, defence leaders will discuss issues such as protecting NATO's southern border, developing NATO's deterrence and defence posture, and strengthening the transatlantic bond.

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**[Hard-pressed businesses urged to](#)**

# appeal unfair rates rise

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- Hard-pressed businesses urged to appeal unfair rates rise

15 Feb 2017



Businesses facing massive rates rises in Scotland have been urged to lodge appeals following a controversial revaluation.

The Scottish Conservatives said any business which feels it can't afford the increase should make those views known to ministers by formally objecting.

The more firms which do so, shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said, the more likely it would be for the SNP to have a change of heart.

Businesses right across the country have warned they will go to the wall if the rates hike is applied, with some facing increases of more than double.

They say the system for revaluation is flawed and needs to be reviewed.

It comes as new figures revealed Scotland continues to lag behind the rest of the UK when it comes to employment, with the jobless number rising by 6000 in the last quarter.

And that will only get worse, the party said, if more businesses are forced to close as a result of the punitive changes.

## **Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:**

"Businesses facing these extortionate increases could send a very clear message to the SNP on this.

"By formally appealing these increases, finance secretary Derek Mackay would soon realise just how severe a problem this is.

"He's refusing to listen to opposition parties and experts, but he might listen to the individuals affected.

"Latest employment figures again show Scotland is trailing behind the rest of the UK, and this is becoming a stubborn and worrying trend.

"If the Scottish Government doesn't heed warnings about firms going out of business as a result of these rises, the unemployment queues are only going to get longer north of the border.

"Derek Mackay seemed able to find tens of millions squirreled away for budget negotiations, so perhaps he could find some extra cash for hard-up businesses

too.”

**Notes to editors:**

For more information on how businesses can appeal, visit:

<https://www.mygov.scot/business-rates-appeals/>

Today, it emerged Scotland continues to lag behind the rest of the UK on employment:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-38979937>

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## **Total foodgrains production in the country is estimated at record 271.98 MT**

The 2nd Advance Estimates of production of major crops for 2016-17 have been released by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare on 15th February, 2017. The assessment of production of different crops is based on the feedback received from States and validated with information available from other sources.