

Press release: UK aid to give clean energy boost to Africa

The Department for International Development's Transforming Energy Access programme has already helped people and businesses across Africa cut 2 million tonnes of carbon emissions and improve the lives of 3.2 million low-income people. It has also leveraged \$359 million worth of investment in clean energy from the public and private sectors.

This additional UK aid announced at an event in London, will:

- fund research into new ways of storing energy in developing countries, including developing new types of batteries and ensuring that electrical waste does not pollute the environment;
- provide further funding to the Energy Catalyst Challenge fund for start-ups to develop new renewable technologies, including solar and bioenergy initiatives. This fund will improve access to renewable energy to thousands of low-income households and enterprises, develop new technologies, create jobs and help leverage public and private finance;
- step up the UK's commitment to clean energy partnerships and research into ways of engaging diaspora communities in the UK to crowdfund energy technology in African countries.

Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, said:

Transforming Energy Access is using the UK's expertise in technology and finance to provide power for people across Africa and tackle one of the world's biggest challenges, climate change.

The UK government's investment in clean energy and waste reduction for people and businesses will help millions of people across Africa. It's a win for the developing world and a win for the UK.

Since 2011, UK climate finance has helped provide 17 million people with improved access to clean energy.

There's still some way to go, with 60% of Africa businesses saying access to reliable power is a constraint on their growth. Power outages cost African countries 1 to 2% of their GDP annually. Currently, 600 million people across the continent have no access to electricity and 70% of African people lack access to clean, non-toxic cooking fuels.

DFID is also allocating UK aid to scale up development of green mini-grids to improve access to clean energy for off-grid communities. This funding, in partnership with the African Development Bank's Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa and the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program, will increase the numbers of green mini-grids in African countries from hundreds to thousands. It will also ensure that mini-grids are embedded into the wider

energy network.

- This new UK funding will see £30 million added to the Transforming Energy Access programme, taking total UK investment to £100 million, and allowing it to continue until 2024. The money will be spent on:
- Innovate UK's Energy Catalyst challenge fund (£10 million):
- Energy Catalyst provides grants to develop clean energy technology for developing countries.
- The extension announced today will help fund technologies such as mini-grids, and solar and bioenergy initiatives. It will also contribute to Energy Catalyst calls for proposals over the next two years, funding a further wave of clean energy innovation.
- Creating energy storage for Africa (£10 million):
- This challenge funding will build on research and innovation expertise developed within the Faraday Battery Challenge, a £246 million programme which is part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) and help find new ways of storing clean energy.
- £3million will support research into finding new energy storage technologies, such as ways of replacing diesel generators, to be administered by the Faraday Institution.
- £7million will fund innovations in battery storage for developing countries through Innovate UK. This will dramatically reduce the costs of storing clean renewable energy technology on and off the grid, enabling people to stop using diesel generators.
- Scaling up successful clean energy and energy capacity building partnerships (£10 million):
- Transforming Energy Access is supporting a series of clean energy partnerships. This includes crowdfunding partnerships that enable distributors to reach the poorest consumers with energy. Partnerships include research into ways of engaging diaspora communities in the UK in crowdfunding energy innovations back in their home countries.
- Transforming Energy Access is also supporting a new partnership involving African and UK universities to develop courses and in-work training and placements for young Africans in clean energy technology.
- Scaling up the Powering Opportunities Partnership will also stimulate rural economic activity in agricultural and other sectors such as manufacturing, retail, timber and carpentry.
- In addition to the £30million funding of the Transforming Energy Access programme, UK aid will increase funding to Green Mini-Grids:
- £21million funding will be spent on green mini-grids from the £65million

Africa Clean Energy (ACE) programme which aims to improve access to reliable energy and will create job opportunities in developing countries. The funding will be spent through the African Development Bank's Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa (SEFA) and the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme (ESMAP).

- All this work on climate supports Global Goal Seven to ensure access for everyone in the world to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy by 2030.
- This announcement comes following the Energy and Clean Growth Minister Claire Perry announced [£100 million of funding](#) to support up to 40 renewable energy products in sub-Saharan Africa at COP24 in Poland in December, giving hundreds of thousands of people electricity for the first time.

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Speech: Back to the Future

On the 3rd of November 1966, "an exceptional quantity of water" was reported in the Arno River, heading towards Florence, Italy.

The flood killed 101 people. Each one of those deaths would have been a private tragedy for the families affected.

It could have been many more. The 600,000 tonnes of mud and sewage hit Florence on a public holiday – so many more deaths were avoided.

Alongside concern for the people affected, the international community was horrified that the city of the Renaissance – the home of the Medici, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo Da Vinci – was devastated.

The feeling was that Florence's cultural contribution to the world would have been an unacceptable loss.

Assistance was immediate. Picasso auctioned a painting; UNESCO launched a global appeal; the city of Edinburgh in Scotland sent double decker busses to help people travel around.

The funds raised have contributed to extraordinary developments in art and architectural restoration that continue over 50 years later.

It's a striking example of the value people imbue in places, and of what we are not prepared to lose to extraordinary weather.

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agreed there are 12

years to bring global temperature rise within 1.5°C of the pre industrial era before climate change reaches a significant tipping point.

Even at 1.5°C, the frequency, intensity, duration and timing of extreme weather – including flooding and heatwaves – will increase.

Do nothing and we are potentially heading for a 4°C temperature rise...

When we talk about adapting to the impacts of climate change, we quite rightly focus on people's safety and economic stability.

As impacts intensify, will we still be able to create places of lasting cultural value and aesthetic beauty?

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I think yes.

But, to do that requires immediate action across organisations and sectors: Governments; regulators; businesses; NGOs; with you – as leaders in construction and development – leading the charge.

According to the Institution of Civil Engineers, over 45% of National Infrastructure and Construction to 2020/21 will be financed through the private sector.

I know that as attendees of Futurebuild 2019 many of you are already innovating and taking the action to prepare for the impacts of climate change.

But time is running short and none of us are keeping up.

The UK will be different in 25 years' time.

The population will have grown by 10 million and more people will live in cities. Smaller family units will mean that the number of households is forecast to increase by 23%.

By the mid-2020s, the government aims to have increased house building to 300,000 new homes a year.

As the population grows, we are likely to see the number of properties built on the flood plain almost double by 2065.

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Last month, the Committee on Climate Change and the Adaptation Committee released a report: "UK housing: Fit for the future?"

This looked at whether the UK's housing stock is prepared for climate change in terms of reducing emissions from UK homes and ensuring homes are adequately prepared for the impacts.

It said:

- Emissions reductions from the UK's 29 million homes have stalled, while energy use in homes – which accounts for 14% of total UK emissions – increased between 2016 and 2017.
- The UK's legally-binding climate change targets will not be met without the near-complete elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from UK buildings.
- And, efforts to adapt the UK's housing to rising temperatures, flooding and water scarcity, are lagging.

The Committee recommends that new homes are built to be low-carbon, energy and water efficient, and climate resilient.

The Environment Agency's purpose is to create better places for people and wildlife – and promote sustainable development.

The National Audit Office says that every £1 invested in flood management saves £9.50 in damages.

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Here in London, the target is 66,000 new homes per year.

The Environment Agency has worked closely with the Mayor of London's Growth and Infrastructure Team to lock environmental outcomes into plans.

At Old Oak Common and Park Royal in West London – which has the potential to deliver 26,500 new homes and 7,500 new jobs over the next 20 years – we're helping the authority to write their local plan, to influence strong environmental standards, and help realise the authority's environmental aspirations.

The £1 billion regeneration of Kidbrooke, Greenwich – which plans to deliver 5,000 new homes, a new railway station, schools, and health care facilities – will include 35 hectares of green spaces, and sustainable drainage systems like ponds and wetlands.

Not too far from there, we've also helped development at the new Pinewood Studios.

This will include 15 new green roofs and 2 large basins providing 13,000 cubic metres of flood storage, alongside over 1km of swales and drainage ditches.

This helps protect the studios from flood in the long-term and is good for both local wildlife, and James Bond.

I use these examples to illustrate that engagement and partnership in development unlocks better outcomes for people and the environment.

We are not realising those opportunities fast enough.

In the future, threats to property and infrastructure will be greater.

Because we have a strong scientific consensus about this exponential – and existential – risk, historians will look back with astonishment at how we repeatedly rebuilt our world for a vanishing status quo.

We shouldn't draw up plans for previous weather extremes, we need to build back better for what is to come.

Just across the river from here, the Thames Barrier helps to protect 1.3 million people, £275bn of property and infrastructure, and places of indeterminable historical and cultural value, like The Tower of London, 10 Downing Street and Westminster Abbey.

The Thames Estuary 2100 Plan – which has a stand here at Futurebuild – looks beyond the life of the Barrier.

Like the Humber flood strategy – it is an example of an adaptive pathways approach to place based flood plans.

It responds to the latest science, economic drivers and environmental changes.

This isn't only about new technology, it's about planning through uncertainty and being flexible.

Last week, the Environment Agency published long-term investment scenarios for flood.

These internationally leading economic assessments to help planning for flood and coastal risk management will form the basis of our 100 year flood strategy – which we will be consulting on this year.

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The report considers a full range of climate change scenarios and the measures needed to create climate resilient places.

We estimate an average annual investment of over £1 billion in flood and coastal risk management is necessary to stop the level of risk increasing.

Current planning policy and implementation limits the impact on flood risk – but how people make investments and planning decisions will be vital.

In theory, very high levels of protection could make a big positive difference to managing long term flood risk.

But, social pressure and technical limitations can make this difficult to achieve in many places.

The value people put on the look and feel of a place means we have to think even more innovatively about how to reduce risk – but this can lead to even

better results.

In Keswick, we used glass panels instead of stone to increase the effective height of defences while keeping much loved views of the river.

In Cockermouth, a self-raising barrier was used to allay local concerns about the look of the flood scheme.

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These challenges are not peculiar to England.

Even in the Netherlands – a country whose identity and culture is entwined with its sea defences – communities oppose the idea of ever higher flood schemes.

At Hondsbossche, sand dunes support sea defences so the existing dikes don't rise ever higher.

Natural flood management like this is adaptable to different levels of climate change – and it supports tourism, which helps the local economy.

Similarly, at Scheveningen Beach near The Hague, the innovative one kilometre long “underground dike” reduces wave sizes from eight meters to two metres while providing locals with a beach.

In Japan, the authorities are innovating ever more extraordinary flood defences to protect communities from tsunamis and typhoons, because once again, people want alternative solutions to vast walls.

Last year, I was lucky enough to visit the vast silos protecting Tokyo from flooding.

Their awe inspiring size and technical brilliance is a stark illustration of the scale of the world's challenge.

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The Environment Agency works with Japan and the Netherlands – and authorities all over the world – to share information and peer review flood schemes at home.

This will continue long after Brexit.

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In my other role – as UK Commissioner to the Global Commission on Adaptation – I am looking at how to accelerate international collaboration on climate change resilience to assist all areas of the globe.

But, our focus needs to be on both adaptation and emissions reduction.

Don't look at these as different agendas, competing with each other for the same pot of money – instead look at how they support each other.

If we develop in a way that contributes to climate change – even in the adaptive schemes we construct to protect society – then we will still fail to keep pace with the rate of change.

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For the past 2 years, the Environment Agency has started to measure the embodied carbon – (or, the carbon dioxide emitted during manufacture, transport, construction, and end of life) – locked up within our flood schemes.

This has allowed us to set a target for reducing it: a 40% reduction from project start to finish.

The tool we use to do this is called ERIC and is similar to the BBC's tool for calculating the impact of their programmes – which is called Albert.

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We continue to trial new materials such as low carbon concrete and have embraced methods such as cathodic protection.

Cathodic protection puts a small current through reinforced steel inside concrete, and this prevents it from rusting in saline environments – that makes it particularly useful in coastal protection schemes.

This significantly increases the design life of schemes which means their lifetime carbon impact is reduced.

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We are beginning to look at how we can steer projects using the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The way we work – and what we do – means that we already hit quite a few of them – and the construction of the Boston Barrier is a good example of how we have started to map our impact.

Our new contractual arrangements for construction partners will have Sustainable Development Goals built in from the very start – projects will have to map out benefits against them.

By making this a core part of how we work, we aim to help form a common language for the links between the goals and business opportunities.

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Such change is a cultural challenge for everyone, our own colleagues and project managers alike, which means training and support.

But – it represents the early first steps on the road to drive down emissions.

And, make no mistake – that is the road we are travelling on.

Last week's record breaking heat – IN FEBRUARY – was a reminder that as temperatures rise, there will be more frequent heatwaves and increased pressure on water resources.

Today, I have mainly talked about flood, but I hope in the questions after we will discuss other climate challenges.

The moral question raised by this conference is: How should we build when we know about the climate challenges that are coming our way?

The novelist Victor Hugo, said: "What is history? An echo of the past in the future; a reflex from the future on the past."

It's impossible to say what aspects of contemporary culture will last through the ages.

But I do know that climate change will be a swift and stern judge of the developments we build today.

And, unless we start taking action, the 11 years we have to reduce carbon emissions will be gone, and our contribution to the history of the world will be eclipsed by sadness, and anger.

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But, that doesn't have to be the case...

I remain optimistic and we are all here at Futurebuild to do better than that.

So, let's work together, reduce our carbon emissions, and create places of cultural value with natural resilience that can be treasured for generations to come.

[Speech: Jeremy Wright's speech at the Enders Conference](#)

Good afternoon everyone and thank you the invitation to come and speak here today.

I often talk about DCMS as being a department that is all about the things that connect us.

Like the ties of civil society that bind us and the culture, sport and heritage that brings our nation together.

These connections of course include our world class media. Media that gives

us all shared experiences and inspires and informs us every day.

And of course, I don't need to tell you, the digital infrastructure that is needed to power our growth as a digital economy.

It is a crucial time for these industries.

In recent years, we have seen new technologies emerge, new firms entering the market and consumer habits changing beyond recognition.

This also presents a range of new challenges for policymakers.

How can we make sure that public service broadcasters remain valued and relevant?

How can we incentivise the type of content that underpins a healthy democracy and society?

And how can we make sure we have the right digital infrastructure to support the digital pioneers who can make this country a better place?

So today, I want to outline three areas I see as crucially important if we are to keep forging the connections that are so important for a well informed and prosperous nation.

Supporting domestic broadcasters

The first is supporting the UK media in a landscape that is increasingly competitive.

There has been a lot of discussion about print media in recent weeks, especially after the publication of the Cairncross Review into high quality journalism.

So today I wanted to talk about our broadcasters, another part of our media that has undergone massive changes I know that you have been discussing this morning.

Traditional TV set viewing of broadcast channels is declining at an increasing rate, with a 5 per cent decline year-on-year in 2018. And for under 25's the figure has fallen by half since 2010.

Even in the midst of this seismic change, our broadcasters remain powerful forces for good at home.

PSBs work for the public benefit to foster shared experiences, stimulate learning and inspire change.

The very nature of our PSBs means they perform services that are in our national interest.

For example ITV's regional news coverage and Channel 4 driving the growth of the sector outside London, including through setting up their national HQ in Leeds.

And they are making a huge impact across the globe too, with hit shows like Sherlock, Planet Earth and Victoria being sold to over 180 territories worldwide.

And of course these PSBs are joined by other diverse and creative broadcasters who share many of their essential values.

Sky and Sky News are a very strong example of this and I am sure you will hear more about their work from Jeremy Darroch a little later.

We must recognise that while global competition and the opening of markets has been beneficial, it has also created tough challenges for traditional broadcasters.

And we must not lose the good that public service broadcasting can do and the impact it makes on our society, our economy, and our standing around the world.

That is why the Government asked Ofcom to look at prominence.

It is vital that our regulatory environment adapts with the market and audience expectations.

And that means ensuring that public service content can be found easily on different platforms and within PSBs' on-demand offerings.

There is no point having prominence rules that relate to how material used to be viewed, rather than how it is viewed today and how it will increasingly be used – from smart TVs to voice control.

And we will consider Ofcom's report carefully when it is published, and if they make legislative recommendations we will look at taking them forward.

But there is also a need to look more broadly at how we can strengthen the foundations that support public service programming.

An example of Government taking a new approach is through the new pilot Contestable Fund.

This will provide up to 57 million pounds for new, UK originated children's content, with a further fund of up to three million pounds for public service radio programming.

This will test a new way of helping emerging British talent reach UK audiences.

The fund is on track to be launched on the 1st April and I would encourage all eligible broadcasters and producers to engage with it.

Of course, on the subject of things scheduled to happen around this time, Brexit.

I realise it has not been an easy period and like all businesses, you are

looking for certainty.

And I will do everything I can to seek the best possible arrangements for broadcasters over the coming months.

We have already confirmed that EU exit will not have any direct impact on creative sector tax reliefs.

And that in the event of no deal, the Government will underwrite the payment of awards made before exit day, for programmes like Creative Europe.

And last month, we reaffirmed our commitment to EU co-production by signing the revised Council of Europe's Convention on Cinematographic Co Production.

I am passionate about creating the best possible conditions for this vital industry to thrive. But we accept that as a Government we do not have all the answers.

I have been heartened to see the work that broadcasters have been doing to form partnerships to achieve greater reach and impact.

Last week, both BBC and ITV announced their plan to launch a new Britbox service.

I am pleased to see the BBC and ITV bringing forward an ambitious proposal and I look forward to seeing more detail on this service as it develops.

I see partnerships like these as a part of a competitive and highly creative future for the sector.

Level playing field

In pursuit of that bright future, the second topic I want to discuss today is a level playing field.

The UK rightly prides itself on its world-leading broadcast regulation that allows for free speech and innovation whilst protecting consumers. It is vital we have effective regulation for digital content too.

The Government will soon be publishing a White Paper on Online Harms, which will set out clear expectations for companies, focusing most directly on those harms which present the gravest threat to user safety.

But beyond the White Paper, we must also make sure that our concept of broadcasting, and our policies towards it, recognise and reflect the growing impact of the digital world.

We all know the likes of Netflix and Amazon Prime are now an established part of our media landscape and we will soon see other players entering too.

Viewers clearly welcome their presence here and they have made a substantial investment..

Netflix reported that it made 40 productions in the UK last year. It has also

made important investments in talent, through training schemes and production initiatives.

They are increasing their UK presence and engagement which is great news for our creative industries and for viewers.

And it's not mutually exclusive to have a thriving PSB system and a thriving SVoD [subscription video-on-demand – pron: es-vod] world.

But as the SVoD landscape develops, we do need to understand what this means for UK broadcasters and UK audiences.

Our regulation of broadcasters is widely appreciated – including by audiences – for its robustness and effectiveness, and it sets the framework for much of the cultural and economic benefit that we so value.

It provides crucial consumer protections, especially with regard to harmful and inaccurate content, which plays an important role in ensuring trust in our broadcasters.

But for relatively new on demand platforms, rules are in many areas not as robust.

We place high expectations on our public service broadcasters to reflect and represent the full diversity of the UK's nations and regions, and in doing so creating a product that often appeals across the globe.

On-demand platforms undoubtedly have global appeal. But it is worth thinking about how we can encourage them to develop in a way that means the content produced here truly reflects UK audiences.

Otherwise there are risks that audiences become more reliant on content that feels, as Sir Peter Bazalgette said recently, "curiously stateless".

These changes are something we will consider carefully as the sector changes rapidly.

Another area where there may not be a level playing field is advertising.

I announced last month that my department will be conducting a review of how online advertising is regulated, and my officials are now scoping out how to take this work forward.

Equity between the regulated broadcast world and currently unregulated online world will also be an important part of our consultation which will be published shortly – on potential advertising restrictions for high fat salt and sugar products.

The consultation will look at online restrictions as well as those for TV. We will make a decision solely based on the evidence and the proportionality of impact.

This distinction between online and offline is one of the most important

policy questions of our time, and it applies to areas far beyond broadcasting.

I went to California a few weeks ago to meet leaders of many of the world's biggest technology firms.

And I was clear that while we are very supportive of technology and innovation, we need to see technology companies doing more to face up to their responsibilities in this area.

There is some important work underway. Only today we saw the conclusion of a joint US-UK challenge event on disinformation.

This gave tech companies who are developing solutions the opportunity to demonstrate their products to a government audience.

But as more and more of our content, and public conversations, move online, we will need robust and democratic frameworks to help us find the right path.

This is not a move against technology; this is recognition that technology plays a huge part in our lives, with all the good it brings.

But it brings challenges too and a responsive and responsible Government must address them.

This is not an easy task but we all have a stake in getting this right and I'm looking forward to working with you all to do so.

Telecoms

And finally, I wanted to talk about another form of forging connections – economic connections through our digital infrastructure.

The UK has a strong digital economy. But to maintain our global position – and be ready for the future – we need to invest now and at scale in the latest technologies.

There is a real opportunity for the UK to become a world leader in digital connectivity – increasing our competitiveness, boosting productivity and meeting the future demands of consumers and businesses.

And we have ambitions in this area to make sure as many people as possible get the benefits, whether they live in urban centres or rural communities.

These ambitions were set out in the Government's recent Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, that sets out a long-term, national strategy for the UK.

We want to see 15 million premises connected to full fibre by 2025, with coverage across all parts of the country by 2033.

We want to make sure 95 per cent of the country has good mobile coverage.

And we want the UK to be a world leader in 5G, a new age of wireless

connectivity that will open up important new areas of growth for our economy.

We have seen significant progress in recent months, with industry taking a leading role.

The availability of full fibre in the UK is now increasing rapidly – spurred by network competition. A million premises received full fibre over the last year.

But the UK still lags behind many of our peers, with only 6 per cent availability.

Mobile coverage has markedly improved – but too many parts of the country still have poor reception.

A strong, competitive telecoms market is the best way of delivering our ambitions.

As a Government we are working to create the best possible conditions to support the large-scale commercial investment we need.

Our barrier busting measures – such as our planned legislation to make sure telecoms services can be installed more easily – will reduce the cost of building fibre and mobile networks.

Our Statement of Strategic Priorities for Ofcom is clear that stable, long-term regulation will be necessary to incentivise network investment – and ensure fair and effective competition.

Our publicly funded Rural Gigabit Connectivity programme will launch in Spring to trial new approaches to fibre deployment in hard-to-reach areas.

And we are spending 200 million pounds on a programme of 5G trials to put the UK at the cutting edge of this new technology.

So a lot is being done – by the market and by Government. But there is a lot still to do.

There is an issue with customer satisfaction in many parts of the industry, as we set out in the recent Statement of Strategic Priorities for Ofcom.

This Government is committed to working with Ofcom and the CMA to safeguard the interests of telecoms consumers, including the vulnerable and less engaged.

More needs to be done to clamp down on harmful business practices and make it easier for customers to switch networks.

And we need to see more on coverage too.

It's time to make seeing "no signal" on your screen a thing of the past.

Ofcom's proposed spectrum auction will make important further progress towards that 95 per cent target.

But the Mobile Network Operators must also show leadership in this area and I am calling on them to respond to this challenge.

I want to see new innovative ideas from industry to deliver widespread, high quality coverage.

And if necessary, we will consider every single tool that we and Ofcom have in the policy and regulatory toolbox in order to achieve that 95 per cent goal.

It is essential that the UK has the telecoms infrastructure to meet the growing demands of consumers and businesses. And promote the benefits of connectivity across the whole of the UK.

These are the opportunities that we need to seize, if we are to build on our world leading digital economy.

Our future prosperity and future productivity depends on it.

Conclusion

This is a very important conference, bringing together our creators and our innovators are what make our country great. And you are all doing crucial work to make life better, easier and more fulfilling for so many people.

A vibrant media means a vibrant democracy.

And strong infrastructure means a strong nation.

And we must have both.

Thank you very much.

[News story: Exports continue to rise across the UK](#)

The number of VAT-registered businesses exporting goods across the UK has increased to 110,800, an increase of over 1,000 since this time last year, according to new figures released today (Thursday 7 March).

Published by HMRC, the figures also reveal that in 2018 compared to 2017:

- Exports of goods from England increased by 2.1% to £248.6 billion
- in Scotland, goods exports increased by 5.6% to £30.3 billion
- in Wales, goods exports increased by 4.2% to £17.2 billion
- in Northern Ireland, goods exports increased by 1.9% to £8.9 billion

Businesses have seen an increased appetite for UK goods from non-EU countries, with the number exporting to these countries in the last quarter rising by 1.3% to 49,900.

The most popular non-EU destination was the USA, where 20.2% of exporters sold goods to, Australia (7.7%) and Switzerland (7.6%).

When comparing 2018 to 2017, the strongest growth in goods exports within UK regions came from East Midlands, which saw the greatest rise in the value of exports (up 7.9%) followed by Yorkshire and The Humber (up 7.8%) and Scotland (up 5.6%).

In the final three months of 2018, the average value of goods exported in the UK per exporter was £780,000.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox MP said:

The continued rise in British exports across the country highlights the true exporting power across all UK regions. This is fantastic news for British businesses, who should be encouraged by these figures to take advantage of the clear opportunities available for growing their business overseas.

People from across the world want to buy British, and through our Export Strategy my department is fully committed to helping businesses make the most of international opportunities.

Launched last year, the Export Strategy set out how DIT will support businesses of all sizes to make the most of significant export opportunities around the world.

The Strategy sets a new ambition from government to increase exports as a proportion of UK GDP from 30% to 35%.

Notes to editors

- The HMRC figures on number of exporters focus on Q4 2018 (October to December) and the comparison to Q4 2017 (October to December). HMRC figures on values of exports compare the year to Q4 2018 with the year to Q4 2017.
 - The Export Strategy sets out how the government will support businesses of all sizes to make the most of the opportunities presented by markets around the world.
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Press release: Traffic officer displays 'superhero' qualities to save injured dog

And sure enough, within minutes of spotting the stray animal, it had wandered into lane one of the motorway and was hit by a passing vehicle.

29-year-old Hannah, from Leicestershire, said:

It was a normal shift and me and my colleague were travelling towards Trowell Services on the M1. I then spotted a dog walking along the hard shoulder on the southbound carriageway.

Clearly there was an obvious danger to the animal and the passing traffic as well, so I pulled the vehicle in front of him to try and prevent him walking any further. Another vehicle then pulled in behind the dog and our vehicle, effectively forming a shield.

Something then caught his eye and he wandered into lane one. Within a matter of moments, he was struck by a passing vehicle and flung into the hard shoulder. I heard an almighty yelp and I ran straight towards him and I wasn't sure if he was alive.

He was whining in pain, so we wrapped him in my colleague's fleece and I grabbed a towel from my bag to put him on my lap until the animal rescue team arrived.

I was talking to him throughout and stroking him trying to reassure him as he was confused by what had happened. He was clearly injured, and we weren't sure if he'd fully recover. He tried to stand up, but was clearly in pain and he looked at me and I just told him to lie down and I cuddled him.

Despite being unsure of the true extent of his injuries, Hannah says a clear bond formed between the pair during those moments while help was on its way.

He kept looking at me and somehow he seemed calmer once I had cuddled him and tried to keep him warm," she said. "I think he realised he was no longer in danger and he saw me as the person keeping him safe.

I found out his name was Thor after the incident. It just so happens that me and my family love Marvel films and I was really hoping he would get better from the ordeal.

And in a twist of fate akin to a superhero movie, Hannah was soon to become Thor's own superhero in her own right by asking to adopt the dog. She said:

It actually turns out the owners didn't want him anymore and I knew instantly that I wanted to adopt him. We've always loved dogs and it was only right that I take him into our family and give him the loving home he deserves.

Thor is now settled in and living happily with Hannah, her son Oscar and partner Rob.

While this story has a happy ending, Hannah also wants to pay tribute to those involved in the rescue and a pivotal role in helping to keep the dog from further harm. She added:

I'd also like to thank everyone involved in this because it was a real team effort. My control room colleagues played a massive part by ensuring they kept an eye on us from CCTV and also, I'd like to thank the dog team and the gentleman that pulled into the hard shoulder to help us during the incident. And also credit must go to the rescue centre responsible for his recovery.

Highways England Regional Traffic Operations Manager, Matthew Pates, said:

We're delighted that this story ended well and it's great that Thor is settling into his new home with Hannah and her family. Incidents involving animals can be unpredictable and it was a real team effort in helping to keep the traffic officers, road users and Thor safe. I'd also like to recognise John Evanson in our control room and Hannah's crew mate on the day, both of whom contributed to the safe and positive resolution of this incident.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.