

Press release: Employment Minister welcomes new record employment rate

New employment figures confirmed 2018 had the UK's strongest jobs market on record with latest updates today (22 January) showing:

- UK employment rate at an all-time high, with more people in work than ever before
- wage growth has outstripped inflation for the tenth month in a row
- unemployment rate is 4.0%

The UK has continued to beat its own record-breaking job figures with a new record employment rate of 75.8% and 32.53 million people in work in November, more than ever before.

Minister of State for Employment Alok Sharma welcomed the figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which also showed real wages increased for the tenth month in a row just before Christmas. Regular pay grew 3.3% on the year – its fastest growth in almost a decade.

The unemployment rate remained at a joint 43-year low of 4.0% with the employment rate reaching a new record high of 75.8%. And with vacancies at a joint record high, 853,000, the data also shows job opportunities continue to be out there.

Minister of State for Employment Alok Sharma said:

Once again, we see a new record employment rate in the UK, 75.8 per cent, with more people in work than ever before. UK workers also got a much needed pay boost before Christmas with wages outpacing inflation for the tenth month in a row in November, growing at the fastest rate in a decade.

There are 328,000 more people in work over the past year, almost entirely driven by full-time jobs as the government delivers an economy that works for the British people.

Our pro-business policies have helped boost private sector employment by 3.8 million since 2010, and as the Resolution Foundation's latest report shows, the 'jobs-boom has helped some of the most disadvantaged groups find employment', providing opportunities across society.

Today's figures also reveal the youth unemployment level has almost halved since 2010, with female employment at a near record high of 71.2%.

Over 3.4 million more people have entered work since 2010, meaning an average of 1,000 more people in work every day. Sectors across the economy are

benefiting, with 23,000 more manufacturing jobs in the last year and 22,000 more jobs in the hospitality sector.

The statistics also reveal three quarters of jobs created since 2010 are full time, permanent roles that are in higher skilled occupations, which typically bring higher earnings – all ambitions of the government's [Industrial Strategy](#) which seeks to create better, well-paying jobs fit for the future.

The government is helping even more people benefit from a well-paid job by:

- backing businesses to create good jobs with our modern Industrial Strategy, while ensuring they play by the rules, so we are closing tax loopholes, strengthening workers' rights, and tightening the rules big businesses must follow
- investing in the infrastructure, training and apprenticeships we need for our future, with public investment at the highest sustained level in 40 years
- introducing Universal Credit which is helping people move into work faster and stay in it longer, while recent Budget measures mean 2.4 million families will keep up to an extra £630 per year of what they earn
- helping people stay in work longer with our [Fuller Working Lives strategy](#), which supports employers to recruit, re-train and retain older workers
- tackling inequalities in employment highlighted by the [Race Disparity Audit](#), through targeted support in 20 areas around the country and £90 million announced by the Prime Minister to help young people
- arranging work experience sessions for students through Jobcentre Plus, in over 1,400 schools

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[Press release: UK and New Zealand to continue Mutual Recognition Agreement as PM Jacinda Ardern visits UK](#)

A trade arrangement between the UK and New Zealand which helps boost international trade will continue when the UK leaves the European Union, supporting jobs in both countries.

The agreement maintains all relevant aspects of the current EU-New Zealand mutual recognition agreement on conformity assessment (MRA).

It helps facilitate trade flows between the two nations and means UK exporters can ensure goods are compliant with New Zealand's technical regulations before they depart the UK, saving businesses time, money and resources. New Zealand exporters to the UK benefit in the same way.

The agreement covers sectors accounting for around £169m of UK exports to New Zealand – more than 17% of total UK exports to the country – and was signed by International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox and New Zealand's High Commissioner.

It coincides with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's visit to London today.

The agreement will ensure UK and New Zealand businesses can continue to benefit from existing arrangements for mutual recognition as they do currently in any Brexit scenario.

It covers valuable sectors such as UK medicinal products and machinery exports, worth an estimated £146m per year.

A similar agreement signed last week with Australia. The agreement has received warm words from business groups including the Association of British HealthTech Industries (ABHI), which supports over 280 members, many of which trade under the agreement.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

Today, our countries are laying down a clear commitment to each other's trading relationship which has already grown to £2.7bn.

This agreement provides UK and New Zealand businesses the certainty they need to continue to access each other's markets as the UK leaves the EU.

The UK is also prioritising a new free trade agreement with New Zealand after we leave the EU as well as potential accession to the trans-Pacific trading bloc, CPTPP, which counts New Zealand as one of its members.

Chief Executive of ABHI, Peter Ellingworth said:

The UK's HealthTech industry has an international reputation for quality, and it is critically important that the sector is supported in exporting to key markets.

The agreements with Australia and New Zealand are therefore welcome

news, enabling two-way trade and the continued supply of products to patients.

New Zealand is one of the first countries the UK is looking to secure a free trade agreement with after it leaves the EU, and the UK is currently analysing the results of a public consultation on the future agreement. New Zealand launched their own consultation on the 23rd November 2018.

[News story: Round 3 GovTech Catalyst challenges announced today](#)

The third round of GovTech Catalyst challenges were announced today. The GovTech Catalyst is the £20 million fund set up to help private sector innovators tackle public sector problems.

At the Government ICT conference today, Minister for Implementation Oliver Dowden announced the next 5 successful challenges from public sector organisations to get funding.

These challenges are:

1. How will we manage autonomous vehicles in local traffic management control systems?
2. How might we proactively monitor the condition of social housing using sensors?
3. How might we better use and understand Scottish land protected for nature and conservation?
4. How might we better predict and sequence adult social care to deliver a seamless service?
5. How might we accelerate the building of new housing using better geospatial intelligence?

[See the full list of all Round 3 submitted challenges](#), both successful and unsuccessful.

Apply to the first competition

These 5 challenges will be launched as [Small Business Research Initiative competitions](#) for tech companies.

The first competition will launch on 4 March 2019 on the [Innovation Funding Service](#).

[Join the mailing list](#) to find out about competition briefing events for interested tech companies.

Update on the other challenge rounds

We expect to launch at least 15 competitions to the market. Here's a summary of the current status of the three rounds of competitions.

Round 1

In January, tech firms finished phase 1 for the [first competition](#) (identifying terrorist still imagery).

Tech firms are currently working on phase 1 for the [second](#) (smart waste tracking) and [third](#) (combating rural isolation) competitions. They'll finish in February and March, respectively.

Tech firms started work on the [fourth competition](#) (real time traffic management) earlier this month.

Tech firms will start work on the [fifth competition](#) (improving local services with data) in mid February.

Round 2

The [sixth competition](#) (real-time tracking for firefighter safety) winners were chosen earlier this month. Tech firms selected will start at the end of February.

The [seventh competition](#) (streamlining public sector audits) closed earlier this month. Submissions are currently being assessed.

The [eighth competition](#) (better detection of illicit goods in the post) closes tomorrow.

The [ninth competition](#) (better understanding of overlaps in business regulation) launched last week. You can register until 20 February 2019.

The tenth competition (prescription continuity when people move between care providers) will launch in February.

Round 3

Tech firms can register to submit potential solutions to the eleventh competition from 4 March to 10 April 2019.

[Read future GTC news](#) on the GDS blog.

Press release: UK experts to work with global partners to tackle global grand challenges

- New international research partnerships to put the UK at the forefront of tackling global grand challenges
- Reducing the impact of ocean pollution, improving security of food supply and controlling infectious diseases among the projects to be led by UK universities
- Part of the modern Industrial Strategy which includes ambitious plans to bring government, businesses and organisations to bring jobs, growth and opportunity to all corners of the UK

The launch of the new UK-led, international project to protect the world's oceans, the One Ocean Growth hub, is one of a number of new international research collaborations announced today by Science and Universities Minister Chris Skidmore.

The 28 projects, supported with £279 million of government investment through the modern Industrial Strategy, will see world-leading UK researchers collaborating with international partners to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges – from tackling the growing problem of anti-microbial resistance, developing the next generation of eco-friendly packaging, to using the latest technology in AI to improve the lives of millions suffering from dementia.

The funding is part of the modern Industrial Strategy's ambition to put the UK at the forefront of tackling the world's grand challenges, generating jobs, opportunity and growth across the UK.

The projects include:

- The One Ocean Hub, led by the University of Strathclyde, which will bring researchers and local communities together to keep oceans sustainable and cut pollution.
- A UK-Israel Innovation programme – the first UK-Israel bilateral programme to support business-led innovation, working with the Israeli Innovation Authority to bring together Israeli strengths in start-up together with UK companies. It will develop and strengthen commercial relationships, provide access to large markets and enhance business competitiveness.
- Tackling anti-microbial resistance – this research programme between the UK and India will develop solutions to tackle anti-microbial resistance which is a growing global health concern.
- UK-Korea Health Sciences collaboration to focus on better diagnosis of dementia through the use of AI.

The partnerships with major international partners and economies including

USA, Canada, Japan and Republic of Korea.

Science and Universities Minister Chris Skidmore, said:

The UK has a reputation for globally influential research and innovation, and is at the centre of a web of global collaboration – showing that science has no borders.

We have a strong history of partnering with other countries – over 50% of UK authored research involves collaborations with international partners.

The projects being announced today reinforce our commitment to enhance the UK's excellence in innovation at home and around the world, driving high-skilled jobs, economic growth and productivity as part of the modern Industrial Strategy.

UKRI Chief Executive Sir Mark Walport said:

From tackling climate change to preventing and treating infectious diseases, the search for knowledge is a global endeavour that requires collaboration between the world's best minds.

The Fund for International Collaboration and the creation of twelve global research hubs demonstrate the commitment of the UK to ensuring our researchers and innovators can work with their counterparts across the world to address important questions.

Of the 28 successful projects, 16 will be receiving a share of £79 million from the Fund for International Collaboration, which will be match funded by partnering developed nations. Twelve projects will be supported by £200 million from the Global Challenges Research Fund. The successful projects are being managed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The government's modern Industrial Strategy sets out Grand Challenges to put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future, ensuring that the UK takes advantage of major global changes, improving people's lives and the country's productivity. The first 4 Grand Challenges are focused on the global trends which will transform our future in Artificial Intelligence and data, ageing society, clean growth and the future of mobility.

[Speech: PM's welcoming statement at](#)

Burns Supper: 21 January 2019

It is great to be able to welcome you here to Downing Street this evening for Burns Supper, this is the second one I have had the pleasure of hosting.

This house of course, has been the home of Prime Ministers of Great Britain and then of the United Kingdom since 1732, 25 years after the Acts of Union that created that single kingdom of Great Britain. So from the start, this house has been symbolic of that union.

It is important to me in everything we do here, and indeed in everything we do as a government, that we reflect the fact that the United Kingdom is a union of four nations. Our country has great diversity within it and we rightly celebrate that diversity. What we actually do in coming together is combine to make something greater than the sum of its parts and it is something that is unique and inspiring.

Of course, Scotland is an absolutely integral part of our United Kingdom – economically, socially and culturally.

Tonight of course in Robert Burns, we are celebrating a Scottish and British cultural icon, one of the finest poets in any language. It is a chance to celebrate a great poet, a great nation and an enduring union. Have a really good evening.