

Press release: Regions say improved connectivity key to improving productivity

Drawing on evidence from over 100 employers, local authorities and universities, HS2: Getting the best out of Britain, highlights the regional strengths of highly skilled manufacturing clusters, universities and research centres, and cutting edge technology entrepreneurs, but warns that more needs to be done to draw them together and realise their full potential in the modern economy.

David Higgins, Chairman of High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd, said:

This report is the evidence that HS2 will boost productivity in the North and Midlands. This is a once in a generation opportunity to join up and amplify the many centres of excellence around the country, as we prepare to exit the European Union.

By improving the connectivity between our major population centres, HS2 will give businesses access to the skills, labour and services they need to change the economic geography of the country.

The report shows that world-leading skills and research in the north and midlands can match that of London and the South-East. Cities and regions in the North and Midlands account for 32% of the UK's research staff working in universities with high quality research, compared to 35% in London and the South-East, and high quality universities produce thousands of graduates every year.

Despite this, employers in the North are still held back by a lack of access to skills, with 30% of businesses in Manchester citing lack of skills as a barrier to growth. At the same time London continues to attract graduates from around the country with nearly half of its population at NVQ4 qualification level or above, compared to a UK average of 37%.

The report, to be launched at an event in Nottingham today, demonstrates that by joining up the major conurbations around the country, HS2 will enable a greater pooling of people and capital around the regions of the UK. This connectivity will enable businesses in the North and Midlands to gain better access to new markets, investments, and become more globally attractive.

Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport, said:

This study clearly shows transport investment is crucial to a strong and resilient economy. That's why we are investing in all forms of transport including the biggest rail modernisation

programme for over a century to improve services for passengers, providing faster and better trains with more seats.

As Britain's new railway, HS2 will deliver vital links between some of our country's biggest cities, driving economic growth and productivity and helping to deliver the government's Industrial Strategy.

By bringing our major cities, regions and communities closer together we are encouraging business and innovation and building a Britain that is fit for the future with a stronger economy and fairer society.

In addition, the study finds that by bringing major cities closer together, HS2 would further support the distribution of the business and professional services market around the whole country, which makes up over 10% of the UK economy. With office costs up to 80% cheaper in the North compare to London, and salaries up to 40% lower, huge efficiency savings can be made. It is estimated that relocating a 50 person skilled legal back office from the City of London to Liverpool could achieve annual savings of £1 million.

Comparing London's highly-efficient transport network with the connectivity that exists within and between city regions in the North and Midlands, the study argues that there is a direct link between productivity and connectivity.

Sir John Peace, Chairman of Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect, said:

The Midlands economy is built on a strong advanced manufacturing base and is enhanced by a wide range of sectoral strengths, universities and research centres. Midlands Connect and Midlands Engine are seizing on the once in a generation opportunity HS2 brings to drive growth for the region, through improved connectivity within the region as well as beyond. We will create a thriving environment for businesses to flourish and HS2 is critical for us to do that.

HS2 is arguably the greatest business opportunity to hit the Midlands in decades, benefitting both the East and West Midlands and collectively we need to be HS2-ready.

Richard Wright, Executive Director Sheffield Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said:

Sheffield, and the region around it, has a strong tradition as suppliers of products to manufacturers in other parts of the country, who produce export goods that the country relies on heavily. We are being held back by poor rail connectivity and capacity on routes to London, Leeds and Manchester in particular.

HS2, properly integrated with the plans of Transport for the North, helps us address those issues.

Professor Clive Roberts, Director of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education, University of Birmingham, said:

High Speed Rail has the potential to transform the regions and cities it interconnects. Lines in Taiwan, Korea and France have helped to distribute economic growth by attracting and helping to create new high value jobs through improved transport opportunities. The plans being put in place by HS2, local authorities and business communities will help ensure that similar success is achieved in Britain.

HS2 will serve around 30 million people and directly serve 25 stations, joining up the dots between where we are now, and where we could get to as a country. A combination of more capacity and better connectivity will improve accessibility, and, therefore, productivity in the North and Midlands at the same time as easing the pressure on London.

[Press release: Welsh Secretary salutes the courage and excellence of the Armed Forces in Wales](#)

The hard work and dedication of Wales' servicemen and women and those who support them will be recognised at the Armed Forces in Wales awards today (30 Nov).

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns will deliver a keynote speech and present the main award of the evening at the prestigious event in Cardiff City Stadium.

Now in their fifth year, the awards honour the accomplishments and professionalism of our servicemen and women, as well as employers and individuals who work tirelessly to support our Service personnel.

The awards are:

- Sports
- Youth and Cadet
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Armed Forces Award

The UK Government has put defence at the heart of its vision for a Global Britain. Earlier this year, the UK Government announced that the tenth Armed Forces Day national event in 2018 will take place in and around Llandudno in the borough of Conwy, North Wales. And with 2,000 troops and over 1,000 MoD civilian staff based here, Wales is at the heart of the UK's Defence.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

From the battlefields of Flanders to the deserts of Afghanistan, Welsh servicemen and women have served in our Armed Forces for the last century with distinction and commitment.

The Armed Forces in Wales Awards provide us with the opportunity to show our appreciation and pride for our soldiers, sailors and air personnel who sacrifice so much for others.

Our debt of gratitude also extends to the families and friends they leave behind but who contribute so much. I am privileged to have the opportunity to celebrate their invaluable contribution to the defence of our nation and I am humbled and honoured to be in their company this evening.

The event will also recognise employers who have made an outstanding commitment to support the Armed Forces.

The Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Awards recognise employers who actively support the Armed Forces community in their workplace and also encourage others to follow their lead.

Mr Cairns added:

The companies nominated tonight have shown outstanding commitment to supporting members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families.

They have taken meaningful steps to ensure the Defence community are not disadvantaged by the sacrifice they make in helping keep this country safe. The actions of these employers make it crystal clear that regardless of size, location, or sector, employing people with military skills is good for business.

ENDS

[Press release: PM's St Andrew's Day message: 30 November 2017](#)

Scotland has a special place at the heart of our precious union of nations.

And today, on St Andrew's Day, it is right that we should come together to celebrate everything that Scotland stands for and all that Scotland contributes to our United Kingdom and to the whole world.

For that is the breadth of Scotland's influence.

From the creativity and ingenuity of Edinburgh's Festivals, three of which celebrated their 70th anniversary this year as some of the world's greatest arts events – to Dr Richard Henderson who has become the 14th Scot to be awarded the Nobel Prize.

From the UK's life-saving humanitarian efforts co-ordinated from East Kilbride to the factory in Falkirk making iconic double-decker buses that are sold to Mexico City.

From Scotland's defence industry, making world-leading warships on the Clyde, to Scottish food and drink enjoyed the world over.

And I am proud that as Prime Minister of our United Kingdom, the government I lead is committed to doing everything possible to support Scotland's continued success.

That includes investing over £1 billion in City Deals that have backed projects from five new technology innovation hubs and the new concert venue in Edinburgh, to the V&A opening in Dundee next year.

And it is that partnership between all the nations of the United Kingdom that makes us even stronger.

So today, let us take confidence from the contribution that Scotland will make in helping the United Kingdom to secure a bold, confident and prosperous future as a truly global nation.

And to all Scots, wherever you are in the world today, I wish you all a very happy St Andrew's Day.

[Press release: UK and Welsh](#)

Governments meet to advance Brexit talks

First Secretary of State Damian Green meets Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns and First Minister Carwyn Jones, along with Local Authority leaders to move discussions on Brexit forward

The next round of Brexit talks between the Welsh and UK Governments will take place today (Thursday 30 November) in Cardiff, where First Secretary of State Damian Green and Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns will meet First Minister Carwyn Jones.

The meeting is the latest in a series of talks between both governments to help determine where powers repatriated from the EU to the UK at the point of Brexit will sit in future. It follows a positive and constructive meeting between the three ministers on 11 October.

Today's talks come after a meeting earlier in the day between Damian Green, Alun Cairns and Local Authority leaders in Wales, to discuss future growth deals, and the potential impact of Brexit on funding arrangements.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

These talks are an opportunity for all parties to move towards an agreement on how powers should be shared as they return from Europe.

It is vital that we make Brexit a success for everyone, and it's in everyone's interests to reach an agreement on where decisions made at an EU level will be made once we leave the EU.

Putting the people of Wales at the heart of decision making is a priority for both governments, and it will not be a case of imposing decisions.

We must not create any new barriers to living and doing business in the UK, which is why we've already agreed the need for common frameworks in some areas.

I look forward to continued positive discussions with the Welsh Government as we negotiate our route out of the EU.

ENDS

Press release: UK Government to host its first ever Global Disability Summit

In her first speech as International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt today announced she will bring together global leaders and technology companies next year to tackle the barriers that prevent people living with disabilities in the world's poorest countries from reaching their full potential.

During a speech at Microsoft's head office in London, Ms Mordaunt will set out that the UK will co-host the Global Disability Summit in 2018.

Speaking ahead of her speech, the International Development Secretary said:

For too long many people living with disabilities in the world's poorest countries have not been able to fulfil their potential due to stigma or a lack of practical support. They are, for example, missing out on school and the chance to work.

Discrimination is unacceptable in today's society. I want us all to act now and break down the barriers people with all disabilities face in their everyday lives, so they are not short-changed on opportunities to use their entrepreneurial spirit to help their countries prosper.

That's why I am bringing technology companies, governments and charities together at the UK Government's first-ever Global Disability Summit in London in July 2018, to show our commitment to transform the lives of people living with disabilities.

People with disabilities have a much lower employment rate in both developed and developing countries. In Bangladesh, this means that \$54 million are lost every year, because people with disabilities do not have the right support. Overcoming these barriers would boost global prosperity.

DFID wants to shine a spotlight on the role that innovation and technology can play to help people with disabilities. For example, UK aid-supported D-Rev, is a small business which developed a low-cost prosthetic knee for young adults in rural Africa and Asia, to make sure it could reach the poorest people.

Innovation and expertise from world-leading private sector businesses, including Microsoft, will be vital for DFID to learn how to successfully support people with disabilities in the developing world.

Hugh Milward, Senior Director Corporate and External Legal Affairs at Microsoft said:

Microsoft believes that technology can play a critical role in removing barriers and empowering people with disabilities. At this moment, the world is at the dawn of a data and technology driven fourth industrial revolution, and these technologies enable governments and organisations to change the way they deliver services to their communities, customers and colleagues.

DFID has already started to put disability at the heart of its development agenda, with programmes funded through UK Aid Match and the Amplify challenge, showing first-hand how the lives of people with disabilities can be improved.

Notes to editors

The Global Disability Summit will be co-hosted with the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

One study in Bangladesh found that, 'reductions in wage earnings attributed to lower levels of education among people with disabilities and their child caregivers were estimated to cost the economy USD 54 million per year'.

UK aid will support programmes which are proven to improve the lives of people with disabilities, including quality education, jobs and healthcare.

For every £1 donated to a UK Aid Match charity appeal, the government will also contribute £1 of UK aid, to help these projects go further in changing and saving lives.

Amplify is a DFID programme in partnership with IDEO.org. which sources early stage ideas to tackle emerging development challenges, including disability. Through the Amplify challenge, DFID has experience of what programmes can help deliver for disabled people globally:

- UK aid funded the Action on Disability and Development International project in Bangladesh to provide skills training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the garment industry and in small businesses.
- British charity Motivation UK broke down the barriers for children with disabilities in Uganda to participate in school by providing training and facilities. Thanks to this work, the attendance rates of children with disabilities in the supported schools almost doubled.