

# Press release: Unemployment remains at 40-year low

Official figures show that unemployment has remained at 4.3%, the lowest rate since 1975.

The figures, released by the Office for National Statistics, also show that employment remains at a near record high, with 32 million people in work.

Increases in full-time and permanent work are behind the figures. In the last year the number of people on zero hours contracts has fallen by 20,000.

Minister for Employment, Damian Hinds said:

The strength of the economy is driving an increase in full-time, permanent jobs and a near-record number of people are now in work thanks to the government's welfare reforms.

When unemployment fell to 5% early last year, many people thought it couldn't get much lower, and yet it now stands at 4.3%.

Everyone should be given the opportunity to find work and enjoy the stability of a regular pay packet. We've cut income tax for 30 million people since 2010, meaning people keep more of their money each month.

Today's employment figures also show

- the number of people in employment has increased by more than 3 million since 2010
- the UK has the third highest employment rate in the G7
- the number of workers aged 50+ has almost reached 10 million – a record level
- youth unemployment has fallen by over 40% since 2010
- there are a near record 780,000 vacancies in the economy at any one time
- the proportion of young people who are unemployed and not in full time education remains below 5%

Separate figures out today show there are [630,000 people on Universal Credit, with 40% in employment](#).

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# Statement to Parliament: Implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention and Protocols

I am today announcing and publishing measures to support the effective implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999 and the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Act 2017.

The United Kingdom ratified the Convention and acceded to the Protocols on 12th September. They will enter into force for the United Kingdom on 12th December.

Commencement regulations have been made to bring the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Act 2017 into force on that date.

I am publishing a document setting out implementation measures in three key areas: cultural property protected by the Convention and Protocols; safeguarding protected cultural property; and use of the cultural emblem.

Part one of the document identifies seven categories of cultural property in the United Kingdom which we consider meet the definition of cultural property set out in the Convention and are therefore protected by the Convention and Protocols. These categories are indicative and non-exhaustive: there may be other cultural property which meets the definition and which is therefore also protected. The list of categories is UK-wide and has been agreed with the devolved administrations.

Part two sets out our approach to safeguarding cultural property. It explains that we do not intend to impose any additional or specific safeguarding requirements on the owners, guardians and trustees of cultural property in England to be implemented during peacetime, given that they should already have plans in place to deal with emergencies and disasters and armed conflict affecting the territory of the United Kingdom is not expected in the foreseeable future.

Part three deals with use of the cultural emblem. It explains when permission to use the cultural emblem is required and how to request permission. It also explains that the government does not intend to grant permission for the cultural emblem to be displayed on immovable cultural property, such as museums and historic buildings, during peacetime, except where a strong, persuasive case can be made for doing so, in order to protect the integrity of the cultural emblem as a symbol of protection during armed conflict.

Initial permissions to use the emblem for education and training purposes and by the Ministry of Defence, for the new Armed Forces' Cultural Property Protection Unit, the British Red Cross, and the Blue Shield International and National Committees of the Blue Shield are included in an annex. These

permissions will come into force on 12th December.

Parts two and three and the permissions in the annex relate only to England. The devolved administrations are responsible for safeguarding cultural property and for granting permissions to use and display the cultural emblem in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I am also publishing a separate guidance document on the new offence of dealing in unlawfully exported cultural property which is created by section 17 of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Act 2017.

Both documents are available [here](#).

I have arranged for copies of both documents to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

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## **Press release: Highways England is geared up for winter**

The company responsible for the country's motorways and main A roads has more than 280,000 tonnes of salt, over 500 salt spreading vehicles ready around the clock to help drivers get to their destinations safely.

Roads Minister, Jesse Norman said:

It is essential to keep our road network running throughout the winter.

Highways England has informed us that they are well prepared for adverse weather, with enough salt to cover 610,000 miles of our motorways.

But the expert advice is clear: drivers need to make their own judgements about road conditions. If it doesn't look safe then they should stay put and travel once weather conditions have improved.

Highways England's national winter and severe weather team leader, Paul Furlong, said:

We care about people getting to their destinations safely and during any severe weather our teams will be working around the clock to keep traffic moving.

We're asking drivers to make sure they and their vehicles are also

prepared. Before you set out, check your vehicle, the road conditions and the weather forecast. If conditions are poor, and journeys are not essential, consider waiting until the weather gets better – this should improve journeys, and give our gritters a chance to treat the roads.'

To help keep traffic moving, Highways England has nearly 130 winter service depots across the country, and more than 250 environmental sensor stations that provide real-time monitoring of road weather conditions and temperatures.

Highways England is urging drivers not to use the hard shoulder to undertake gritters, risking a collision with a stationary vehicle and causing a hazard when gritters try to come off at junctions.

Drivers are asked not to take unnecessary risks this winter and only pass a gritter when it is safe to do so, avoiding using the hard shoulder and checking for hazards ahead.

During severe weather drivers are urged to follow this advice:

- In snow and ice, drivers should stick to the main roads where they can and only travel if necessary
- drivers are also encouraged to make sure they have a winter kit in their vehicle, including an ice scraper and de-icer, warm clothes and blankets and sunglasses to cope with the low winter sun
- In high winds, there's a particular risk to lorries, caravans and motorbikes, so drivers should slow down and avoid using exposed sections of road if possible
- In heavy rain, drivers should keep well back from the vehicle in front, gradually ease off the accelerator if the steering becomes unresponsive, and slow down if the rain and spray from vehicles makes it difficult to see and be seen
- In fog, drivers should switch on their fog lights and not use lights on full beam as the fog will reflect the light back – if you really cannot see, you should consider stopping until it is safe to continue

Drivers are advised to follow messages on the overhead signs and listen to radio updates. Further information can be found by [visiting our traffic information website](#) or calling the Highways England Information Line on 0300 123 5000.

## **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.

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# Press release: UK Government Minister Lord Bourne visits leading Welsh University

Marking his return as a Minister for the UK Government in Wales, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth will visit the University of South Wales (USW) Newport campus today (15 Nov).

It follows the announcement of the university's plans to deliver degrees to aerospace engineering students as a key partner at the UAE's new Dubai South development.

The USW will accept its first students in Dubai South from September 2018 in a facility in the development's existing Business Park.

The visit comes following the Secretary of State for Wales recent trade mission to Qatar, where he highlighted the wider opportunities markets in the UAE present for the whole of Wales. International Trade Secretary Liam Fox also visited the USW's stand at the Dubai Airshow last weekend (12 Nov).

## **Lord Bourne said:**

The University of South Wales is quickly developing its status as a leading Welsh university with a strong international reputation.

Higher Education is a key export for the UK, and Dubai South will be one of the world's leading aerospace hubs.

We want to provide our higher education institutions with the platforms to share their expertise and skills worldwide. USW is a dynamic university bridging the gap between industry and academia and the UK Government is committed to supporting its progress.

Lord Bourne will also tour USW's National Cyber Security Academy where the university is piloting a specialist degree, accredited by GCHQ. The degree aims to train and develop expertise within cyber security, contributing to a developed workforce and plugging a shortage of skills within the sector. He will also take the opportunity while in South Wales to visit Newport's St Woolos Cathedral.

More information on USW's presence at Dubai South is at [www.southwales.ac.uk/dubai](http://www.southwales.ac.uk/dubai)

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# Speech: The Foothills of the Digital Age

Thank you for inviting me to this Tech Summit.

The word summit of course has two popular meanings. There's a gathering such as this, and then there's the peak – the zenith, the apex, the apogee – the highest point that can be reached.

When it comes to tech, and to digital technology, we are very far from the summit of what can be achieved. Indeed, we are only beginning to even glimpse the potential of where digital technologies might take us, and how much they will transform our world.

These are very much the foothills, and now we must be ready for the climb. Policy making is always as much about anticipating and preparing for the future as it is with addressing current issues.

Our Digital Strategy, published in March of this year, set out how we intend to make the UK the best place to establish and grow a digital business and the safest place for citizens to be online. That means today, but also in the future, so we are ready for the changes ahead.

It established seven pillars that underpin the changes we need to see and I'd like to update you now on the impressive progress that, just eight months in, we have already made.

The first pillar, and central to everything, is infrastructure. In the Digital Strategy we committed to building a world-class digital infrastructure for the UK. That means ubiquitous coverage, so no one is left out, and with sufficient capacity not only for today's needs but in readiness for tomorrow.

We are on track to meet the target, set out in the Strategy, of superfast broadband coverage at 95% by the end of 2017. Then to reach the final 5%, we legislated in the Digital Economy Act, which received Royal Assent this year, for a Universal Service Obligation to deliver decent broadband to all. In the modern economy, broadband is essentially a utility, and I'm pleased it is increasingly delivered by a competitive market of providers.

For mobile reception, each MNO is obliged to provide voice coverage to 90% of the UK by the end of this year. Meanwhile, 4G premises coverage rose from 29% in 2015 to 72% last year and in our Manifesto we set a target of 95% coverage of the UK landmass. People must be able to stay connected wherever they live, work, and travel.

But at the same time as fixing the current technology, we must also look

ahead the next generation, and that means 5G and full fibre.

Our 5G strategy, released at Spring Budget 2017, outlined the necessary steps. As part of a £1.1 billion investment in digital infrastructure, we are funding a coordinated programme of integrated fibre and 5G trials to ensure the UK leads the world in 5G connectivity.

Today, we're launching a pilot scheme in Aberdeenshire, Bristol/Bath and North East Somerset, Coventry, Warwickshire, and West Yorkshire, which will see local companies offered vouchers by broadband suppliers to pay for gold-standard full-fibre gigabit connections. This should help revolutionise our digital infrastructure, and make it fit for the future, so we trust that take-up will be high.

The second pillar of the digital strategy is skills. At every level, from getting people online for the first time, to attracting and training the world's top coding talent, Britain needs stronger digital skills if we are to thrive in the years ahead.

Government can't address this shortfall alone. So when we launched the Digital Strategy in March, we committed to establish a new Digital Skills Partnership, between Government, businesses, charities and voluntary organisations. The aim was to bring greater coherence to the provision of digital skills training at a national level.

And at the launch we promised to create more than four million digital training places. Just eight months in, we and our partners – including Barclays, Lloyds, Google, and many others – have impressively over-delivered, with more than two million places made available, in everything from basic online skills through to cybersecurity and coding. These skills will be crucial to our country's future prosperity, so we intend to keep up the pace.

The third pillar is to make the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business.

Make no mistake, Britain is already a global tech powerhouse, with more than 1.4 million people working in digital tech and new jobs being created at twice the rate of other sectors. In the first half 2017 there was a record £5.6 billion invested in tech in the UK – including from Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, IBM, and Google – and the sector has an annual turnover of £118 billion.

All impressive figures, but we can still push further.

So today we are unveiling a £21 million investment to create a new national network of regional tech hubs, across the country, from Belfast to Edinburgh, Cardiff to Birmingham. The funding will also help entrepreneurs in emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and FinTech, by connecting them to peers and potential investors in other hubs across the country, as well as by offering tailored development programmes.

And, as the Chancellor has announced, Tech City UK and Tech North are to become a single national organisation, Tech Nation, to speed up the growth

and reach of the UK's innovative digital clusters. Companies that have already benefitted from Tech City UK's input include Just Eat, Funding Circle and Zoopla, and they haven't done too shabbily. So this is very welcome news.

The fourth pillar of the Digital Strategy is that every UK business should be, to some extent, a digital business.

In July we launched the Productivity Council, which was developed through discussions with UK business leaders, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors, and designed to encourage and support UK businesses to go digital. Analysis suggests that only a modest improvement across a broad base of firms could unlock billions of Gross Value Added every year.

The fifth pillar is to make the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online.

Our Internet Safety Strategy, published last month, is a substantial step towards that goal. The Strategy sets out how we all must play our role in tackling online harms. We want to bring together groups from across our whole society and hear from people of all backgrounds – including technology firms, schools, the voluntary sector, and citizens young and old as we turn ambition into reality.

We will bring in a statutory code of practice for social media companies, and are consulting on an industry levy to support educational programmes and technical solutions. We also want to see more transparency, to help inform future policy.

Ensuring the internet is safe means cyber security too, and our National Cyber Security Strategy, funded to the tune of £1.9bn, sets out what we are doing to help improve Britain's cyber security.

One of the programme's many aims is to find, finesse and fast-track tomorrow's online security experts. Over 6000 young people – between 14 and 18 years old – are now being invited to test their skills in online cyber and problem solving challenges, via a £20 million training programme. They might then win a place on the Cyber Discovery scheme, where they can learn cutting-edge skills from cyber security experts.

But keeping citizens safe online means more than protecting against cyber crime. It means ensuring that norms of behaviour online match those we have always valued offline.

The Digital Strategy is now complemented by the Digital Charter, as introduced in the Manifesto. The Charter will reinforce the work we started with the Strategy but will further consider how we apply the liberal values we value offline to the online world, so we can seize the opportunities that unprecedented connectivity provides, while also mitigating the harms it creates.

Throughout we will be guided by three core principles. First, what is considered unacceptable offline should not be accepted online. Secondly, all

users should be empowered to manage their own online risks. Lastly, technology companies have a responsibility to their users to develop and protect safe online communities.

And we are committed to bringing about a sustainable business model for high quality journalism. I welcome Google's movement towards this, not least removing the one click free policy, but there is much more to do to ensure we find a genuinely sustainable business model for high quality journalism, as we have, for example, for the music industry that's been through a similar radical disruption but found a way to a model that seems to be working.

The sixth pillar of the Strategy is to digitise Government.

Since the creation of Government Digital Services in 2011, Britain has been a world leader in such work.

From applying for a passport, to applying for lasting power of attorney, dozens of Government services have been digitised. The massive project to make tax digital is proceeding carefully, and the feedback from those who use the new digitised service is encouraging. Our G-cloud procurement system is being copied around the world, as it allows and encourages contracts to go to small innovative companies, not the traditional main players. In February this year, we had 3,947 suppliers on the Digital Marketplace, of which 93% were SMEs. And as a result our GovTech market is booming.

And so we arrive at the final pillar: data.

The Digital Strategy has also committed to unlocking the power of data in the UK economy and improving public confidence in its use. Research shows that, currently, more than 80 per cent of people feel that they do not have complete control over their data online, and that is too high.

So we are strengthening our data protection laws through the new Data Protection Bill, making UK law consistent with the EU's GDPR. Under its proposals individuals will have more control over their data, through the right to be forgotten and to ask for their personal data to be erased. They will also be able to ask social media channels to delete information they posted in their childhood.

We want to end the existing reliance on default opt-out or pre-selected 'tick boxes', to give consent for organisations to collect personal data. We all know these are largely ignored. The Data Protection Bill will make it simpler to withdraw consent for the use of personal data and require explicit consent to be necessary for processing sensitive personal data. It also expands the definition of 'personal data' to include IP addresses, internet cookies and DNA.

New criminal offences will be created to deter organisations from creating situations – be it through pure recklessness or deliberate intent – where someone could be identified from anonymised data. The data protection regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office, will be given more power to defend consumer interests and issue higher fines for the most serious data

breaches.

So there you have it. We may be in the foothills of this digital age but we are well equipped for the climb, and remain alert to any obstacles ahead. Much remains to do but I am confident the measures I've just outlined will continue to ensure our good progress.