

News story: Unemployment rates continue to drop and are now at the same level as the rest of the UK

Alun Cairns has welcomed the latest job figures which show that unemployment rates in Wales have dropped in the last quarter and are now at the same level as the rest of the UK.

These latest figures show good progress on bringing the unemployment rate down but more still needs to be done to increase the rate of employment.

The UK Government is determined to continue to develop the right conditions for economic growth, investment and jobs in Wales.

I'm convinced that increasing exports to new markets will not only grow the Welsh economy but will create jobs across Wales. I'm doing everything I can to help companies in Wales maximise their exporting potential.

Speech: Why I'm determined to win the war against 'silent killer' sepsis

Looking back over my 5 years as Health Secretary, one conversation that left the deepest mark was very early on with a young couple from Devon.

Scott and Sue Morrish came to London to tell me about the tragic death of their 3-year-old son Sam, who died just a few days before Christmas in 2010 after a repeated failure to spot that he was suffering from sepsis. Scott and Sue quietly and eloquently explained the story of his illness, and finally treatment that came too late.

They said that when they tried to raise the issue with their local NHS, the 'shutters came down' and no one wanted to talk to them.

I have talked to the hospital concerned and believe the culture has now dramatically changed. But the fact is that in the UK, around 123,000 people of all ages develop sepsis every year, with potentially 30,000 avoidable deaths.

It is often referred to as the silent killer because the early symptoms – fever, lethargy and pallor – can be mistaken for other problems.

The key is to spot the problem early and administer antibiotics and fluids

quickly to halt the infection in its tracks.

But in Sam's case, no fewer than 4 healthcare providers had missed opportunities to identify the condition and administer the treatment that could have saved his life.

Today, on World Sepsis Day, I remember the conversation with Sam's parents and pay tribute to their courage and determination – alongside other sepsis campaigners like Melissa Mead – to raise awareness and change practices within the NHS.

Their campaigning has already triggered a much tighter, more systematic approach to identifying and treating the condition.

Many hospitals have now put in place clear guidelines and training to ensure that every member of their medical team is trained to spot the signs and symptoms of sepsis and treat them effectively. And practical measures like routinely checking patients arriving at Accident & Emergency departments for signs of sepsis are estimated to have saved almost a thousand lives in recent years.

But do I think even more deaths could be prevented? The answer is, undoubtedly, yes. That's why we are now setting out further measures to improve standards in hospitals, surgeries and other healthcare settings.

It will mean more training resources, greater awareness and better recording and identification of sepsis cases across the NHS. Every part of the NHS will be expected to be on the highest alert to tackle this killer condition.

But everyone needs to help win the fight against sepsis – by being aware of the facts.

If you do one thing this week, please [watch and share the awareness video](#) that we've developed in partnership with Melissa Mead and the UK Sepsis Trust.

By understanding what sepsis is and how it shows itself in people of different ages, we can all arm ourselves with the information to keep our loved ones safe.

Let's be smart about sepsis – and together, we can finally win the war against this silent killer.

[News story: Avian Influenza: UK now](#)

disease-free but Chief Vet urges vigilance

The Government Chief Vet has today announced the UK has met international requirements to declare itself free from Avian Influenza (AI) H5N8, but reiterated calls for all poultry keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease, as there is a real and constant threat.

The disease continues to circulate in Europe and as winter approaches the risk of migratory wild birds infecting domestic poultry will rise. The UK was previously declared free of Avian Flu in April 2016 but the disease returned in December that year – so the government is not complacent.

Declaring the UK free from AI means trade discussions on UK poultry and poultry products can restart with existing and potential new trading partners.

Between December 2016 and June 2017, 13 cases of AI were confirmed in kept poultry in the UK. In all cases, the Animal and Plant Health Agency put movement restrictions in place to limit the spread of disease and carried out thorough investigations into the source and possible spread of infection. The government also introduced UK-wide measures to protect poultry from infection from wild birds, including a requirement to temporarily house birds and a ban on bird gatherings.

Today Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens urged keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease as winter approaches and [reiterated the need for good biosecurity](#) at all times:

Declaring the UK free from avian flu is an important milestone that will help our efforts to re-open export markets. The past nine months have been very challenging for all those who keep poultry, and I would like to thank everyone for their efforts in helping us contain the disease to a handful of premises.

However, I urge all keepers to be vigilant – there is a constant risk of avian flu from wild birds and this is likely to increase as winter approaches, temperatures fall, and migratory birds arrive in the UK.

All poultry keepers should take steps to reduce the risk to their birds, such as cleaning footwear, feeding birds indoors, and minimising contact with wild birds. Building these simple actions into routines now can help prepare for any future outbreaks.

H5N8 avian flu was confirmed at commercial premises in Suffolk, Lancashire and Lincolnshire, and in backyard flocks in Northumberland, Lancashire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire and Carmarthenshire. The same strain of the virus

was also found in wild birds in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The government continues to carry out surveillance in poultry and wild birds and publish regular disease updates.

Further information

- Under World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) rules, three months must elapse from the application of measures to prevent the spread of disease or cleansing and disinfection of the last infected premises before a country can be declared disease-free. The last case of AI in the UK was confirmed on 2 June, and cleansing and disinfection completed on 14 June 2017. Countries are required to fulfil a number of requirements on biosecure disposal of carcasses, the application of effective disinfection and surveillance.
- The UK CVO will declare on the UK's behalf by submitting an evidence paper to OIE for publication on the OIE WAHIS website alongside other countries that have already self-declared.
- Following an exotic disease outbreak, it is routine practice in the UK to evaluate the response and identify lessons for future outbreaks. A [report summarising lessons from the 2016/17 AI outbreak](#) is published today.
- Read and download [our advice poster for keepers of poultry](#) (PDF, 1 page).

[Speech: Rail renaissance: dealing with the consequences of success](#)

Good morning everyone.

It's always a pleasure to be part of a Transport Times conference.

And today (13 September 2017) is no exception.

An expert audience.

Distinguished rail industry speakers.

And an agenda that tackles some of the big challenges facing the railway

today.

Mind you – there are always big challenges facing the railway.

This is an industry that's been in almost constant flux since the Second World War.

From nationalisation in 1948.

And Beeching in the 1960s.

To the reorganisations under British Rail in the '70s and '80s.

And privatisation in the 1990s.

What's striking about these landmarks in rail history is that they were all attempts by government to reverse the fortunes of a declining industry.

Nationalisation under Clement Attlee's Labour government was an attempt to stabilise the 'big four' rail operators, each of which was effectively bankrupt.

The Beeching cuts were a radical response to a decade of falling passenger numbers and rising losses.

And privatisation was intended to halt the further slide of the railway – which had seen usage fall by almost a third between 1960 and 1995.

Of all these different reforms, it's that last one – privatisation – that stands out.

Because it's the only one that worked.

It didn't just stabilise passenger numbers.

It transformed them.

And laid a path for future success.

For a growing, competitive, profitable railway that delivered for the passenger and the taxpayer.

And that success is something to bear in mind today.

Because the issues you're discussing at this conference.

Like franchising, rail investment, and Network Rail's future direction.

Are all consequences of industry success.

Of a rail renaissance that not even the most enthusiastic supporters of privatisation could have predicted 20 years ago.

The statistic that's normally used to illustrate the impact of privatisation

is that twice as many journeys are made on the railway today as in the mid-1990s.

And that's certainly true.

But there are other achievements that are no less impressive.

Rail's share of the overall transport market has also doubled.

More trains are running than ever before.

We've now got one of the safest railways in Europe.

And franchises are delivering.

Not just for passengers.

But for taxpayers too.

As Rail Magazine noted earlier this year, from requiring £1.5 billion of state subsidy in 1998 to 1999, train operators made a net contribution of more than £1 billion to the public purse in 2014 to 2015.

And they will continue to deliver more for the taxpayer in years to come.

Now of course not everything's gone to plan.

The standard of services on some routes has fallen well below the level expected by passengers.

But most franchises are working well.

And they show that we now have a robust and sustainable foundation for running and financing the rail network.

So it's no surprise that other European countries are also ending state rail monopolies and opening up their networks to private operators.

Big challenges remain.

But they must be seen within the context of the huge progress we've made.

The question now is, how do we build on this success?

As with any competitive business, the first by-product of success is growth.

But to stay successful, you need to keep growing.

And that means you have to invest.

Today the rail network is operating on the edge of what it can cope with.

Many routes are under considerable pressure.

And yet demand continues to rise.

You can see that either as a problem, or an opportunity.

I see it as a massive opportunity.

The industry is in a unique position.

Knowing that there's a growing market out there for its services.

Few other businesses have that privilege.

Our job now is not to chase growth.

It's to make a growing railway viable.

We have not been in this position before.

Frankly, no post war government has.

So to support continued growth, we're delivering the biggest modernisation programme for more than a century.

And right around the country.

Take the Great North Rail Project.

Just part of a £13 billion northern transport programme this Parliament.

Already, links between Manchester and Liverpool are much improved.

New services to Glasgow have been launched.

But there's a lot more to come.

A comprehensive upgrade that from 2020, will deliver faster and more comfortable journeys for millions of passengers – from Bradford to Blackburn and Stockport to Sheffield.

Franchises are investing to transform services.

For example, [Northern and TransPennine Express](#) will bring more than 500 new carriages into operation, with room for 40,000 extra passengers and more than 2,000 extra services a week.

Within 3 years, all trains on these routes will be brand new or completely refurbished.

And finally, those wretched Pacers will be gone.

Something only the most hardened trainspotter could regret.

We are also investing in the biggest upgrade of the Midland Main Line since it was completed in 1870.

That will mean more seats and faster journeys during the peak.

The next operator will deliver modern, fast and efficient intercity and commuter trains, including a brand new set of [bi-mode intercity trains from 2022](#).

This will improve journeys sooner, without the need for wires and masts on the whole route, with further investment to ensure Sheffield is ready for HS2.

On the Great Western Line, new Intercity Express trains will provide 40% more seats in the morning peak once the full fleet is in service.

The first will enter service from this autumn.

And when electrification to Cardiff is complete, journey times between Swansea and London will be about 15 minutes shorter.

Next year, Crossrail opens.

Thameslink will be complete.

HS2 construction gets going in earnest.

We'll carry on improving services all around the country, from the Lake District to East Anglia.

And because we can never return to the 'stop-start-and-stop-again' planning of the past, it's vital we carry forward the next generation of rail projects.

So work will continue on developing Northern Powerhouse Rail and Crossrail 2.

Over the next few years, we'll see the benefits of a more mature franchising model.

And record investment in the infrastructure.

Really making a difference to passengers' daily journeys.

But I also want to see radical improvements to the way the railway is run.

I've been clear that there was a flaw in the privatisation process.

The separation of track and train into different businesses was a mistake.

It pushed up the cost of running the railway.

Both for taxpayers and passengers.

And it slowed down decision making about how to tackle the looming capacity crisis.

Greater fragmentation meant the industry lacked clarity and accountability.

And projects were continually hampered by complex contractual disagreements.

Yes, we've seen some improvements recently.

Closer, joined-up working on the Southern network.

The alliance structures built in to franchises like South Western and Great Western.

Better performance on the West Coast Main Line, partly because of greater co-operation.

And the launch of East West Rail to restart services between Oxford and Cambridge.

But this is only the start.

We need a lot more integration throughout the industry.

Network Rail, rolling stock companies, and train operators – working as one team.

Making infrastructure and performance improvements as part of a relentless drive to boost customer service.

So I will continue incentivising the industry to form joint track and train teams as new franchises are appointed.

Not as isolated examples.

But across the railway.

I expect the South Eastern and East Midlands franchises to have aligned management, and integrated operational teams between train and infrastructure.

This is a strategy that will not only underpin franchising.

But also Network Rail's devolution plan.

Putting more power and accountability into its route businesses.

Allowing them to form more effective partnerships with local train operators.

A joint board now supervises performance on the western route, and a new one for east coast was announced recently.

Supervisory boards for all routes should follow by next spring.

This will mean services are run predominantly by local teams of people whose whole focus is the smooth running of the timetable.

Whether it's planning essential repairs.

Responding to problems on the line.

Or communicating with passengers.

They don't have to work for the same company or organisation.

But they do have to work as one team, jointly responsible for achieving shared objectives.

For me, this goes to the heart of the debate on the structure of the industry.

It's not about ideology.

It's about common sense.

If the success of the railway since privatisation can be measured in the number of people using the network, increased investment, greater efficiency and improved safety.

Then success in the future will come from reorganising the way services are run.

Simpler, more accountable structures.

Joined up management.

Using all the skills and experience we have in spades across this great industry – to do one thing.

Focus on the passenger – and leave a true legacy of success for the next generation.

Thank you.

News story: Defence Secretary announces £55m contract for UK bomb disposal robots at DSEI

Following an initial £4 million demonstration phase, the robots will be purchased from US robotics manufacturer Harris under the MOD's Project Starter for use by the British Army, and will be supported by engineers at Harris EDO MBM Technology in Brighton, where the contract will sustain 10 highly-skilled jobs.

[In a keynote speech](#), the Defence Secretary outlined how the Harris T7 robots use 'advanced haptic feedback' to allow operators to 'feel' their way through the intricate process of disarming from a safe distance, protecting UK

personnel from threats such as roadside bombs.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

With our rising defence budget, we are investing in the latest equipment for our Armed Forces to tackle the growing threats we face. These state-of-the-art bomb disposal robots will be powerful and reliable companions to our troops on the battlefield, keeping them safe so they can help keep us safe.

The British Army's new bomb disposal robot.

Equipped with high-definition cameras, lightning-fast datalinks, an adjustable manipulation arm and tough all-terrain treads, the robots are able to neutralise a wide range of threats.

The haptic feedback function is designed to provide operators with human-like dexterity while they operate the robot's arm using the remote control handgrip. The unit gives the operator physical feedback, allowing intuitive detailed control.

The announcement comes after a competition between the world's leading manufacturers, organised by the MOD, with the new fleet replacing the current Wheelbarrow Mk8b. All 56 robots are due to be delivered to the UK and in service by December 2020.

Chief Executive Officer for Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, Tony Douglas said:

This contract has been designed to deliver future-proof, world-leading technology at the best value to the taxpayer. Innovation is central not only to the success of this remarkable system, but also to the relationships across DE&S, Industry and the frontline commands which allowed this agreement to be reached.

With 141 international delegates from 60 countries, DSEI showcases British business and innovation across security and defence. The Defence Secretary toured the exhibition and announced the latest investment in advanced equipment for the UK's Armed Forces.

In addition to new bomb disposal robots, the Defence Secretary announced that UK personnel will be protected by a new lightning-fast protection system under development by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). The new 'Icarus' system, involving a consortium led by Leonardo, will be able to detect and defeat threats to armoured vehicles within 100 milliseconds: many times faster than a human could respond.

The proof of concept Technical Demonstrator Programme is worth £10 million to the UK economy and will develop system sensors and countermeasures to defeat

a wide range of current and future battlefield threats such as Rocket Propelled Grenades and Anti-Tank Guided Weapons, helping to protect the lives of the UK Armed Forces.

The Demonstrator Programme will initially secure 45 jobs across the UK and has the potential to create up to 250 jobs if the system is eventually deployed.

The Defence Secretary also pointed out that, for the first time, a full-scale model of the UK's future laser turret will be on display at DSEI. In January 2017 the MOD awarded a [£30 million contract](#) to the MBDA-led Dragonfire consortium, to demonstrate the potential of Laser Directed Energy Weapons. The demonstrator will be tested on UK ranges from 2018 with in-service capability planned by the end of the 2020s.

Following Minister for Defence Procurement Harriet Baldwin's [announcement of the successful first firings](#) at sea of the Royal Navy's new Sea Ceptor system last week, the Defence Secretary also pointed out that the British Army is showcasing the new Land Ceptor air defence system launcher at DSEI. Developed by MBDA, Land Ceptor will replace the Army's Rapier system as part of the new Sky Sabre capability.

The Innovation Initiative and £800m Defence Innovation Fund aim to transform Defence to encourage imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship. From laser weapons to autonomous vehicles, the MOD is working with small firms, academics, industry, and the [new Defence Advisory Panel](#) to find Twenty-first century solutions to defence challenges.