

Press release: Prime Minister hosts reception in Downing Street to celebrate St David's Day

Prime Minister Theresa May is hosting a reception to celebrate St David's Day in Downing Street today where she will welcome guests from the worlds of business, media, tourism, sport and the charity sector.

A number of companies will be showcasing their products at the event including Welsh whisky, beer and wine as well as cheese from Snowdonia and Welsh cakes. There will also be a performance from the Welsh choir, Côr Heol y March.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

I am pleased to be celebrating St David's Day with a reception in Downing Street.

Our precious Union is at the heart of everything my government does, which is why [Wales was one of the first places I visited](#) when I became Prime Minister.

And, today, as the Welsh flag flies high alongside the Union flag over Downing Street, we are reminded of the huge part Wales has played in our history and the crucial role it will play in the future prosperity of the UK.

I wish you all a very happy St David's Day.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Today, we have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our national day amongst the people making their indelible mark in their communities, their country, and across the world.

From our brave service men and women to our great figures from the arts, business, culture and sport, these are the people helping to make Wales' future as glorious as its rich and illustrious history.

I send my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating St David's Day at home and around the world.

Press release: Trade Union Act measures come into force to protect people from undemocratic industrial action

Measures coming into force today (1 March 2017) will protect millions of people from the effects of undemocratic strike action

- Tougher ballot thresholds will reduce industrial action in important public services like transport, health and education by 35%
- 1.5 million working hours a year will be saved from strike action
- Measures will provide a £100 million boost to UK economy over 10 years

Trade Union Act measures come into force today (1 March 2017) to protect millions of people from the effects of undemocratic strike action.

The Act will ensure that if strikes do go ahead it will only be as a result of a clear democratic decision from union members thanks to the introduction of tougher ballot thresholds.

From today, fresh ballots will have to achieve at least a 50% turnout of eligible union members, with a majority voting in favour of strike action. In important public services – including in the health, education and transport sectors – an additional threshold of 40% of support from all eligible members must be met for action to be legal.

The Act will also:

- reduce strikes in important public services by 35%
- prevent more than 1.5 million working hours a year from being lost to strike action
- boost the economy by £10 million a year

Business Minister Margot James said:

“The public has a right to be protected from unsupported disruption being caused by a small proportion of union members and that’s exactly what the

Trade Union Act will do.”

From 1 March, the Act will also require unions to:

- give employers a minimum of 14 days’ notice before industrial action rather than the previous seven days
- set a six-month time limit – which can be increased to nine months if the union and employer agree – for industrial action so that mandates are always recent
- provide a clearer description of the trade dispute and the planned industrial action on the ballot paper, so that all union members know what they are voting for
- provide more detailed information to union members about ballot results, including how many union members were entitled to vote and whether the relevant thresholds have been met
- report more detailed information on industrial action, ballot results and expenditure of political funds to the Certification Officer, the unions’ regulator, which will then be made public
- ensure supervision of picket lines to ensure they are peaceful
- implement an opt-in system for new members on contributing to political funds within 12 months

Notes to editors

1. From today, unions have until 1 March 2018 to ensure all new members joining will have to make an active choice to opt into their union’s political fund. Previously new members would have to opt out of contributing to a union’s political fund.
2. The [Codes of Practice on Picketing](#) and [Industrial Action Ballots and Information to Employers](#) have been updated to reflect these legal changes and come into effect on 1 March 2017.
3. The Trade Union Act also introduces new measures in relation to the Certification Officer who will be given new enforcement powers, a financial penalties scheme, and a cost-recovery levy scheme. The Government will consult on proposals for the financial penalties and levy schemes in due course.

4. Sir Ken Knight will today begin gathering evidence for his independent review of electronic balloting for industrial disputes

[News story: Double penalties for motorists using mobiles](#)

New drivers face losing their licence if they use their phones at the wheel under tough measures coming into force today (1 March 2017), warned Transport Secretary Chris Grayling.

Motorists using a phone while driving will receive [6 points on their licence and a £200 fine](#) – up from the previous 3 points and £100 penalty.

Motorists caught using their mobile twice or accruing 12 points on their licence will face magistrates' court, being disqualified and fines of up to £1,000. New drivers, within 2 years of passing their test, risk having their licence revoked and lorry or bus drivers can be suspended if caught.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Our message is simple and clear: do not get distracted by your mobile phone while driving. It may seem innocent, but holding and using your phone at the wheel risks serious injury and even death to yourself and other road users.

Doubling penalties will act as a strong deterrent to motorists tempted to pick up their phone while driving and will also mean repeat offenders could find themselves banned from our roads if they are caught twice.

Everyone has a part to play in encouraging their family and friends not to use their phones while driving – it is as inexcusable as drink driving.

Police forces across the country will be taking part in a week's enforcement from 1 to 7 March. This will see extra patrols and an increased focus on cracking down on people using their phones while driving. About 3,600 drivers were handed penalties in the last co-ordinated enforcement week from 23 to 29 January this year.

[The Carvin family case study film](#)

The government has launched a powerful and thought-provoking [THINK! campaign to warn drivers of the new penalties and the dangers of using mobiles while](#)

[driving](#). The campaign will see adverts on billboards, radio and social media as well as a hard-hitting video in cinemas, which was developed in partnership with The AA Charity Trust. Stickers and other in-car merchandise that encourage motorists to put their phone away and out of reach while driving will be distributed through partnerships with driving schools and car rental companies.

[Designated Driver – Don't text and drive](#)

Britain has some of the safest roads in the world but the government is determined to make them safer. The Department for Transport announced in 2015 it was exploring whether to increase the penalties for using a mobile phone while driving. This received almost unanimous support during [last year's consultation](#). The Ministry of Justice has recently finished a [consultation on increasing the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving from 14 years to life imprisonment](#) in an additional crackdown on reckless drivers.

Chief Constable Suzette Davenport, National Police Chiefs' Council roads policing lead, said:

These new penalties reflect the seriousness of the offence and will strengthen the deterrent against using a mobile phone at the wheel. We need people to understand that this is not a minor offence that they can get away with.

Across this week officers will continue to use innovative and intelligence-led tactics to catch and penalise people who are driving while distracted by a mobile phone. However, this is an attitudinal problem that we cannot simply enforce away by putting more officers on the roads.

This issue has to begin with personal responsibility by drivers. We know that people are more likely to report other drivers using a phone than to view themselves as guilty of it. That has to change.

Tougher penalties are a step in the right direction, but police forces and partners are working this week to make it socially unacceptable to use a mobile phone at the wheel. It's about more than what you might have to pay as a penalty – you could hurt or kill an innocent person on the roads by checking a text or taking a call.

Don't do it – and don't let others take the risk either.

Edmund King, president of the AA, said:

Too many drivers are addicted to their phones. Half of young drivers can't bear to turn them off in the car. If they don't switch off their phones they could lose their licence with the new 6 penalty points.

We need to break this addiction and the best way is for drivers to go cold turkey – turn off the phone and put it in the glove box. We are delighted THINK! will be supporting our radical new advert and believe it will begin to make text driving as socially unacceptable as drink driving.

RAC road safety spokesman Pete Williams said:

Our latest report on motoring highlighted that the use of handheld mobile phones is at epidemic proportions and sadly the attitudes of many drivers have relaxed towards this illegal and dangerous activity. The new tougher penalties will therefore be welcomed by law-abiding motorists as a better deterrent.

The change in the law is one important step in helping make using a handheld phone at the wheel as socially unacceptable as drink-driving. The fact that it is joined by a new high profile THINK! campaign which will also focus on the dangers of using a handheld phone when driving, targeted enforcement by the police to let offenders know they will be caught and the RAC's BePhoneSmart.uk 'make a promise' website, means there is now real momentum in getting drivers to change their behaviour for good.

The new penalties come into force in England, Scotland and Wales.

Members of the public can report repeat offenders to Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111 and information will be passed on to police forces.

[Press release: Digital Strategy to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business](#)

- Skills, infrastructure and innovation at the heart of new strategy to support Britain's world-leading digital economy
- Includes a new Digital Skills Partnership and bold new pledges for millions of free digital training opportunities

- Backs the UK digital sectors to invest for the long term and includes measures to help all businesses harness the productivity benefits of digital innovation

More than four million free digital skills training opportunities will be created as part of a [Digital Strategy](#) to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business and ensure our digital economy works for everyone.

A pioneering new Digital Skills Partnership will see Government, business, charities and voluntary organisations coming together to make sure people have the right skills for the jobs in their area and are aware of all the digital training opportunities on offer. This Government-led initiative will help both businesses and individuals and make sure no one is left behind.

The strategy includes new commitments, including a plan by Lloyds Banking Group to give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, charities and small and medium businesses by 2020; plans by Barclays to teach basic coding to 45,000 more children and assist up to one million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness; and a pledge by Google, as part of their commitment of five hours of free digital skills for everyone, to help boost digital skills in seaside towns.

It is part of the Government's ambitions to ensure everyone has the skills they need to flourish in a digitally-driven economy.

The strategy follows the recent modern [Industrial Strategy](#), and will help Britain to build on its strengths to secure a future as a competitive, global nation.

Businesses have played an important role developing the strategy. To capitalise on these new relationships and deliver a thriving, outward-looking digital economy, the strategy also sets out plans to empower innovative businesses and deliver world-class connectivity. This includes:

- The creation of five international tech hubs in emerging markets to create and develop partnerships between UK companies and local tech firms. These hubs will help provide British businesses with a global competitive edge and drive collaboration on skills, innovation, technology, and research and development. The hubs will be based upon the successful UK-Israel Tech Hub which to date has delivered more than 80 partnerships with a deal value of £62 million.
- A new competition to spark the development of new FinTech products that can support those who struggle to access financial services and provide consumers with the tools they need to manage their finances well. This will build on the UK's existing lead in the FinTech sector, which was worth more than £6.6bn in 2015, and make sure the digital economy works for all, not just the privileged few.

- A commitment to create a Secretary of State-led forum for government and the tech community to work together to spark growth in the digital economy – through innovation and the adoption of digital in the wider economy.
- A Business Connectivity Forum, to be chaired by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to bring together business organisations, local authorities and communications providers to help businesses access fast, affordable and reliable broadband.
- Confirmation of £1 billion programme to keep Britain at the forefront of digital connectivity, announced at Autumn Statement. This funding will accelerate the development and uptake of next generation digital infrastructure – including full fibre broadband plans and 5G.

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Karen Bradley said:

The UK's world-leading digital sectors are a major driver of growth and productivity, and we are determined to protect and strengthen them.

This Digital Strategy sets a path to make Britain the best place to start and grow a digital business, trial a new technology, or undertake advanced research as part of the Government's plan to build a modern, dynamic and global trading nation.

To do that, we will work closely with businesses and others to make sure the benefits and opportunities are spread across the country so nobody is left behind.

There should be no digital divide – every individual and every business should have the skills and confidence to make the most of digital technology and have easy access to high-quality internet wherever they live, work, travel or learn.

At the heart of the strategy are steps to ensure everyone can develop the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world and measures to help businesses harness the benefits of innovation.

Government has taken the lead in this area and has committed to help adults who lack core digital skills to access training free of charge, similar to the approach taken for literacy and numeracy. The strategy builds on this by establishing a Digital Skills Partnership and, as part of the Digital Strategy, Government has secured the following new pledges from private sector organisations:

- Google will launch a Summer of Skills programme in coastal towns across

the UK. It will develop bespoke digital skills training schemes to help boost tourism and growth in seaside towns.

- Lloyds Banking Group is to give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, small and medium businesses and charities by 2020. The training, as part of its Helping Britain Prosper Plan, will include internet banking.
- Barclays will assist up to 1 million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness in 2017, grow its UK Eagle Lab network by up to 100 per cent, and teach basic coding to 45,000 children.
- BT will expand its Barefoot Computing Project to enable a further 500,000 children to develop early computational thinking skills by the end of the 2017/18 academic year. The scheme helps primary school teachers with no previous computer science background feel confident to teach the new computing science curriculum.
- The HP Foundation will bring a free online learning platform – HP LIFE – to the UK. This will improve business, IT and digital skills for disadvantaged groups in the UK and aims to reach 6,000 new UK users over the next five years.
- Accenture will partner with FutureLearn to develop a new national digital skills programme to boost learning through online collaboration. Through partners, the programme could reach as many as 100,000 people across the UK.

Josh Hardie, CBI Deputy Director-General, said:

UK companies are at the forefront of the digital revolution. The pledges announced by the Government underline businesses' commitment to build the skills we need for a modern economy, as well as tackle barriers to technology adoption.

To uphold our position as a world-leading digital economy businesses, we and the Government need to work together – the strategy's focus on skills, connectivity and innovation provide a useful framework for this.

Gerard Grech, chief executive, Tech City UK, said:

The UK's tech sector is rapidly becoming a global force to reckon with, but we must ensure that we stay ahead by continuing to provide a supportive environment for British startups and digital

companies to grow in, especially since other countries are trying to take advantage of our departure from the European Union. In the UK tech sector jobs are being created at twice the rate of the wider economy, and today's Digital Strategy provides an ambitious road map for the industry to continue growing at this rate and building a new economy fit for the future.

Nick Williams, Managing Director, Consumer and Commercial Digital at Lloyds Banking Group, said:

I'm delighted that Lloyds Banking Group, as part of its new Helping Britain Prosper Plan, has made such a significant commitment to improve digital skills in the UK. By working with the Digital Skills Partnership, and our key partners such as Google and The Good Things Foundation, we can help to tackle some of the issues raised by the Government's Digital Strategy. Our commitment to provide face-to-face support will make a huge difference to millions of individuals, small businesses and charities across the UK.

Ronan Harris, Google Managing Director UK & Ireland, said:

We believe that digital can have a transformative impact, no matter where you live and what your job is. Everyone deserves access to the tools and opportunities the web has to offer and that is why we welcome the Government's timely Digital Strategy which ensures the benefits of the digital economy are spread across the country.

We are delighted to be part of the Digital Skills Partnership and will continue to invest in the free skills training offered through the Digital Garage, launch a new programme aiming to help seaside communities, and – as a global first – are launching engineering apprenticeships, giving young people without a degree the opportunity to join Google's world class software teams.

The strategy also contains new measures to support Britain's world leading AI sector which were announced earlier this week.

- A major AI review led by Wendy Hall and Jérôme Pesenti to identify the critical elements for this exciting technology to thrive and grow in the UK. It will consider how Government and industry could work together to back this technology, with the aim of establishing the potential for a possible sector deal. The UK is already a world-leader in the science underpinning this technology and the sector has the potential to grow further, from early research to commercialisation.

- A funding boost of £17.3 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to support the development of new robotics and artificial intelligence technologies in universities across the UK.

The strategy also builds on the [Government Transformation Strategy](#), launched earlier this month by Minister for the Cabinet Office Ben Gummer, which maps out how Government will transform the relationship between the citizen and the state to improve public services. This has ambitions to make it as easy to renew your passport or report a crime as it is to buy a book online, and aims to sign up to 25 million people onto the Government identity service Verify by 2020.

Media enquiries and interview requests – please contact the DCMS News and Communications team on 020 7211 2210.

Professor Dame Wendy Hall FRS FEng is Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton. Wendy is an entrepreneur, and one of the world's leading computer scientists. She was a founding director of the Web Science Research Initiative, now the Web Science Trust, and is the Executive Director of the Web Science Institute at Southampton . She was president of the British Computer Society from 2003-04 and was the first person from outside North America to be elected President of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) from 2008-10. Since 2014, she has served as a commissioner for the Global Commission on Internet Governance and is a non-executive director of Dstl and the Digital Catapult.

Jérôme Pesenti is the CEO of BenevolentTech, the technology division of BenevolentAI, a British technology company using artificial intelligence to accelerate scientific discovery. He is a world-leading pioneer in the commercialisation of AI. He co-founded Vivisimo, a tech firm specialising in text mining and enterprise search engines, which was acquired by IBM. At IBM he became chief scientist of big data, and created and led the development of the Watson Platform – the first comprehensive cloud platform for artificial intelligence.

Speech: Belfast Partners launch event

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the inaugural Belfast-London Network event, I am very grateful for the invitation.

Belfast Partners is an exciting initiative aiming to showcase all that Belfast has to offer across the globe.

And it makes sense for it to begin in London, reinforcing and strengthening already established links between these two great cities.

Belfast has a long and illustrious economic history, from the turn of the 19th Century, when it was the largest linen producing country in the world, or from when it housed the world's largest shipyard.

And today Belfast has a significant role to play in growing the economy across Northern Ireland.

Of course there are already significant trades from the City that flow through Belfast.

In finance, Citi Bank, which established a Belfast presence in 2004 to support its London offices, now employs around 2000 people in a range of activities.

And last year, Tullett Prebon, one of the world's leading interdealer brokers, announced plans to create 300 new Belfast-based IT jobs. In legal services, Allen & Overy, one of the world's largest international law firms, has pledged to create over 48 jobs in Belfast by 2019, building on the success of the operation it has built there since 2011.

While Herbert Smith Freehills, one of the oldest and most established firms in the City of London, has over 200 staff in Belfast, including qualified lawyers and legal assistants.

I could go on.

It is clear Belfast is already providing important and valuable support to established London businesses.

And there is much too London can learn from Belfast, where the city is already a world leader in areas such as cyber security.

Belfast, and Northern Ireland more generally – ably led by its Universities – also has much to offer in the field of science, research and innovation, a key pillar of the Industrial Strategy.

And this has already been recognised by Government.

In a clear example of the potential this Government sees in Northern Ireland, Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency, has embedded a business manager within Invest NI in Belfast, to help find and drive the scientific and technological innovations that will help to grow the NI, and UK, economy.

This Government is serious about developing the economy across the country.

We now have the highest number of people in employment on record and the UK's economic deficit is down by almost two thirds.

In 2016, the UK economy grew faster than any other major advanced economy across the globe and the Bank of England has positively revised its economic projections for this year.

And this growth is reflected across the county.

In Northern Ireland, there are now almost 54,000 more people in work than in 2010 and the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit is almost 50% lower than at its peak, and has now fallen for nine months in a row.

But this is not enough.

Much more remains to be done to realise the Prime Minister's vision of an economy that works for everyone and not just a privileged elite.

For businesses, and I know many of you will have a vested interest here, the National Productivity Investment Fund will add £23 billion in high value investment, including bringing significant benefits to Northern Ireland.

And the modern Industrial Strategy, currently out to consultation, aims to build an economy that will grow from strength to strength, not just for years but for decades to come, increasing productivity and improving living standards across the country as a whole.

I am already engaging with my Business Advisory Group to ensure the interests of Northern Ireland are best represented, and I encourage everyone here to respond to the Green Paper to make your voice heard.

The Government also remains committed to the devolution of corporation tax to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The legislation is ready and waiting, on the statute books, but it can only be activated if there is a stable, functioning government that is demonstrating sustainable finances.

That is why making politics work in Northern Ireland so important.

Belfast City Council is the cornerstone sponsor of Belfast Partners, and I know the Council's CEO Suzanne Wylie, who will be speaking shortly, has ambitious plans for the City.

I will let Suzanne say more, but the Council has a vision for growing Belfast economically and boosting the quality of its public services.

However, many of the levers for realising this vision sit with the devolved Executive.

That is why it is so important for political leaders to come together after the election this week and work for the good of everyone in Northern Ireland.

I remain in no doubt that Northern Ireland is best served by strong, accountable and effective devolved government.

This is a message that I hope can be echoed from here tonight.

On the topic of our withdrawal from the EU, I fully understand that businesses need certainty to prosper.

That is why we are moving as quickly as possible to trigger Article 50 no

later than the end of March.

The Prime Minister recognises the impact uncertainty can have, and has moved to very clearly set out the UK's key objectives for the upcoming negotiations:

To control our own laws and end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice;

To strengthen the precious Union between the four countries of our United Kingdom;

To maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland;

To control immigration from Europe while continuing to attract the brightest and best to study and work here;

To guarantee rights for British nationals in the EU and EU nationals living here;

To protect workers' rights;

To pursuing an ambitious free trade agreement with the EU, outside the single market but allowing for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and EU member states;

To strike new trade agreements with other countries around the world;

To keep the UK as the best place for science and innovation;

To continue to co-operate in the fight against crime and terrorism;

And finally, to ensure a smooth, orderly Brexit with an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two year Article 50 process has concluded, followed by a phased process of implementation.

Leaving the EU now offers us an opportunity to forge a new role for ourselves in the world: to negotiate our own trade agreements and to be a positive and powerful force for free trade.

We will continue to promote the wonderful exports that Northern Ireland has to offer and highlight that Northern Ireland has great potential as a base for exports to the EU.

And, as we have made clear from the moment the people decided to leave the EU, we will be steadfast in our determination to recognise Northern Ireland's unique economic, social and political context.

One of the central tenets of the Government's Industrial Strategy is driving growth and prosperity from London and the South-East out across the whole country.

I hope this event will spark the conversations and ideas that champion the benefits of Northern Ireland as a place to do business, enhancing

partnerships wherever they already exist and igniting new relationships.

I understand that the London-Belfast partnership is just the beginning, and I look forward to partnerships growing between Belfast and other cities across the globe.

We must move to capitalise on the skills available in Northern Ireland, growing science and innovation, boosting further our tourist industry and encouraging the flourishing digital and creative industries.

We know through companies like First Derivatives, with headquarters in Newry and employing 1700 people worldwide, business can grow and prosper in Northern Ireland.

Hopefully you can make the connections here tonight, and at future events, to let others see what we see when we talk about the potential of Northern Ireland and the success story that Northern Ireland can continue to be