

[Press release: Call for evidence on how to reduce the cost of energy launched](#)

Groups are being called upon to submit their views on how the cost of energy can be cut, following the publication of Professor Dieter Helm CBE's review

A call for evidence on reducing the cost of energy has been launched by the government today, following the independent review by Professor Dieter Helm CBE.

On 25 October, Professor Helm concluded his independent review which outlines recommendations on how to reduce costs in the power system, whilst ensuring the UK meets its climate change targets.

Building on the government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper, Professor Helm was asked to consider the whole electricity supply chain of generation, transmission, distribution and supply, and recommend how to reduce costs in each part.

The Government [is now calling on industry, businesses and consumer groups to give their opinions](#) on Professor Helm's recommendations to government.

Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark said:

Energy bills are too high for consumers. We have been clear that we are committed to bringing down costs, both for households and for businesses.

I commissioned this review to start a debate about the future of our energy markets. Now I am opening up that debate, asking everyone with an interest to give us their views on Professor Helm's ideas for bringing down the cost of energy for consumers.

Any stakeholders who would like to comment on the findings should email their submissions to costofenergy@beis.gov.uk by 5 January 2018.

[Press release: Minister for Europe](#)

[visits Albania and Kosovo](#)

During his first official visits to Albania and Kosovo, the Minister will meet senior government representatives, entrepreneurs, journalists and future leaders to reaffirm the UK's commitment to the Western Balkans and to discuss preparations for the UK-hosted 2018 Western Balkans Summit.

In Tirana, Albania, the Minister will hold discussions with Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati, Interior Minister Fatmir Xhafaj and Justice Minister Etilda Gjonaj. He will discuss the UK cooperation on judicial reform, the fight against organised crime and tackling corruption.

With Interior Minister Xhafaj, the Minister will attend the launch of Albania's Strategic Plan to tackle Organised Crime Strategy. Sir Alan will also meet Chevening Scholars and young entrepreneurs

In Pristina, Kosovo, the Minister will meet President Thaci, Prime Minister Haradinaj, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Communities and Return, and the Ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs to discuss UK support for the rule of law in Kosovo.

The Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

My first official visits to Albania and Kosovo come at an important time, as we continue to work with our partners in the region on reform and progress.

In Albania the UK is working to help judicial reform and the fight against organised crime and corruption, as well as the country's EU membership aspirations.

The UK has a special relationship with Kosovo. We were the first country to recognise its independence, and we remain committed to supporting Kosovo's progress and working together on rule of law. We have a joint interest in seeing Kosovo develop into a prosperous country that is a source of stability in the region.

Further information

[News story: OTS's first review of VAT](#)

triggers debate

The Office of Tax Simplification (OTS) report, published today, offers a range of proposals for simplifying the tax.

This first [report on VAT](#) from the OTS contains 23 recommendations for simplifying the tax. Its lead recommendation on the future level and design of the VAT threshold is already prompting debate.

The 8 core recommendations are:

- the government should examine the current approach to the level and design of the VAT registration threshold, with a view to setting out a future direction of travel for the threshold, including consideration of the potential benefits of a smoothing mechanism
- HMRC should maintain a programme for further improving the clarity of its guidance and its responsiveness to requests for rulings in areas of uncertainty
- HMRC should consider ways of reducing the uncertainty and administrative costs for business relating to potential penalties when inaccuracies are voluntarily disclosed
- HM Treasury and HMRC should undertake a comprehensive review of the reduced rate, zero-rate and exemption schedules, working with the support of the OTS
- The government should consider increasing the partial exemption de minimis limits in line with inflation, and explore alternative ways of removing the need for businesses incurring insignificant amounts of input tax to carry out partial exemption calculations
- HMRC should consider further ways to simplify partial exemption calculations and to improve the process of making and agreeing special method applications
- the government should consider whether capital goods scheme categories other than for land and property are needed, and review the land and property threshold
- HMRC should review the current requirements for record keeping and the audit trail for options to tax, and the extent to which this might be handled on-line.

To help illustrate some of the issues highlighted by the report, both generally and for small business, the OTS has published two pictograms today.

PDF, 540KB, 1 page

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A [press release](#) about the report was published on Friday.

[News story: Traffic commissioners call for commercial vehicle operators to make urgent improvements on brake testing](#)

The Traffic Commissioners for Great Britain are warning commercial vehicle operators to improve their approach to brake performance testing.

Their intervention comes as the issue of poor brake testing – or the complete absence of any checks – is appearing ‘far too frequently’ during investigations by enforcement officers.

The regulators added that, despite the clear lessons from the Bath manslaughter case, operators are simply paying lip service to brake performance testing. In many cases, there’s too little recorded on the brake test to offer a meaningful assessment. In others, no information is recorded at all.

Operators are also failing to carry out testing at the required frequency.

Sarah Bell and Kevin Rooney, the lead traffic commissioners for enforcement,

said:

Despite the clear warnings for industry, traffic commissioners are still receiving reports about a lack of effective and proactive brake performance testing regimes.

This is not limited to a specific type of licence, size of operator or a particular sector – it is across the board. That is why TCs are highlighting the need for a change of attitude within the industry towards brake testing.

There should be no compromise in any operator's approach, no flexibility around standards.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) [Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness \(2014 revision\)](#) makes clear that every safety inspection must include a metered assessment of the braking performance of vehicles and trailers. It adds that a road test method to assess the brake performance for all planned safety inspections will usually be inadequate.

Where deficiencies in brake performance are identified, either during use of the vehicle or trailer or at the safety inspection, a measured brake efficiency test must be carried out. The efficiency test must confirm the brakes are performing satisfactorily before the vehicle or trailer can be considered as roadworthy.

DVSA also publishes detailed guidance on [how to prepare a vehicle for the brake testing element of the MOT](#).

In recent cases at public inquiry, traffic commissioners have seen:

- a Barking operator with missing brake figures on PMI sheets
- a Louth operator with brake test results not added to PMI records and no evidence of periodic brake testing being carried out – the DVSA vehicle examiner also identified the use of a vehicle with a braking defect for a whole week, despite the driving identifying the defect during daily checks
- a Coddensham firm with the brake test section of PMI records not completed and 4 brake performance tests not conducted annually on each vehicle / trailer
- a London operator who failed to comply with a public inquiry undertaking to have roller brake tests carried out every 6 weeks, with PMIs
- an Ashford firm which had not subjected its vehicle to a brake test since 6 December 2016, with the brake testing section of PMI records left blank on 5 out of 7 inspections
- a Rainham business which failed to comply with a specific undertaking to have quarterly brake testing
- a London operator with 'not applicable' written in the brake test section of every PMI

Offering advice to the industry, Kevin Rooney and Sarah Bell added:

Operators should carry out an urgent review of their brake testing regime now.

This should include an analysis of safety inspection records over the last 15 months, looking at whether the type of test and the information recorded is sufficient. Operators must make sure their brake tests are planned in line with DVSA guidance and satisfy themselves that the vehicles and trailers running under their licence are roadworthy.

We want licence holders to be sure their brake testing regimes are effective.

[Speech: The UK and France – A joint approach on digital and cybersecurity](#)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am grateful to the Embassy for organising this event.

The UK and France have a historic and close partnership and cybersecurity is no exception.

Whatever challenges we face in the future, with our strong partnership and talent in the UK and France, I know that we will always work to ensure the prosperity of our two countries.

We are neighbours. Neighbours here, neighbours today, neighbours tomorrow. Always neighbours.

Earlier this month we in the UK marked the first anniversary of our National Cyber Security Strategy. We have been busy, in securing Britain's future online.

Like you, we have appointed our first ever Minister for Digital, and we have even renamed my department to make us the "Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport" to reflect the critical importance of all things digital to the UK.

Let's recap on why this is so important.

In the UK, our tech industry created 3.5 million jobs in past year and 4 in 5 Brits bought something online in the past year – more than anywhere else in the world.

As jobs are increasingly changed, and as we face up to the fact there are

jobs that technology destroys, so we must be at the forefront of the drive to create the new jobs that technology allows. We cannot stop the disruption, but we can help those disrupted, with a clear goal of redeployment, not unemployment.

And this great digital technology that is made by man, which brings great power and liberation and freedom must be hewn to benefit all mankind. The technology is made by man and it is within man's gift to maximise its freedom while protecting the freedom of others.

While this mission is new, the principles that underpin it are old.

We can find some wisdom in the very founding documents of the French Republic.

On the internet, we seek nothing less than freedom, fraternity and equality.

Freedom, that we cherish the unprecedented and unimaginable freedoms the internet brings. This includes:

- Fraternity, that we harness the internet to bring us together not tear people apart
- Equality, that all of us online are treated fairly, that we benefit the same protections online as off, and that each and every one of us can benefit from the technology of tomorrow, equal to the dictum of Sir Tim Berners Lee, the founder of the world wide web, that 'this is for everyone'

This need, this drive, to build an online world that cherishes these liberal values, the values of de Tocqueville, as well as Burke, is increasingly recognised around the world.

The internet is growing up, from a libertarian childhood, in which all connection was seen as a good thing, to a maturity where freedom must be tempered by the need to prevent harm.

As the great modern British philosopher Sir Roger Scruton has said: "In the libertarian free-for-all what is worst in human nature enjoys an equal chance with what is best, and discipline is repudiated as a meddlesome intrusion." So what does this mean in practice?

In the UK, we have set out our approach as a Digital Charter, that will detail how the great freedoms online can be balanced with that discipline, each and everyone's "important responsibilities". To protect from harm, from abuse, to terrorist content, to protection of intellectual property.

And of course a safe internet is one where data is protected, and cyber security is strong. The UK has long identified cyber threats as a key challenge to our nation's security. The National Cyber Security Strategy committed £1.9 billion for cyber, with the express goal making the UK the safest place to live and work online.

We have made significant progress towards these goals. We have created the

National Cyber Security Centre, to bring together responsibilities, protect our critical services from cyber attacks, manage major incidents, and improve the security of the Internet in the UK. In that year alone, the NCSC dealt with 590 significant cyber attacks. More than one a day.

We are transforming the advice and guidance on offer to the public, based on ever-improving evidence and technical insight.

We have launched a range of initiatives to make sure the next generation have the cyber security skills to meet significant growing demand:

- Our first apprenticeship scheme for critical sectors such as energy and transport was inundated with applications (nearly 1,250 people applied for the first 23 apprentice roles)
- The CyberFirst Girls competition saw 8,000 talented 13-15 year olds take part
- Our Cyber Schools Programme will train nearly 6,000 14-18 year olds over the coming years

We are also showing leadership in other areas, such as investigating security in the Internet of Things, to look at the best way to ensure internet-connected devices are safe, and have security built-in from the start.

And we can't do these things alone. Critically, we need to work together with industry, and we have put huge effort into fostering and supporting a strong and vibrant cyber ecosystem.

We are active and restless in developing the whole ecosystem to support growth, innovation and security. I know here in France you are doing many similar things.

The UK and France both have thriving cyber ecosystems.

As one of the UK's closest export markets and allies, France is a perfect partner for the UK in cyber, both in research and at a commercial level.

The UK's cyber sector is booming. The workforce has grown significantly and cyber security exports were worth around £1.5 billion to the UK last year alone.

To stay ahead of the threat, it's crucial we foster innovation in cyber security. That's why we're developing two Cyber Innovation Centres – in London and Cheltenham – to support the development of new technologies and the latest generation of cyber security companies. As part of that, we have established the GCHQ Cyber Accelerator – the first of its kind in the world – combining the world class expertise of the UK's security and intelligence agency with start-ups to develop new capability, and leading edge academics.

But we mustn't be complacent. It's crucial we work with our international partners: working closely with them, sharing information, and facing challenges together – because our security is inextricably linked.

We are working to make the UK the best and most secure digital economy in the

world. To that end, we will ensure our friends' and our partners' cyber safety whenever and however they do business with us.

And with that, I leave you with a salute, to the enduring values of freedom, fraternity and equality.

I hope you have a brilliant conference.

Long live the neighbours!