Press release: April Labour Market Statistics for Scotland

The Scottish unemployment rate has fallen to 4.5 per cent, which is below the rate of 4.7 per cent for the whole of the UK.

The labour market statistics also show that employment in Scotland fell by 8,000 over the three months to February 2017. The number of those in employment in Scotland now stands at 2,596,000.

Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell said:

> While there is some good news for Scotland in these figures, the falling employment numbers and rising inactivity statistics are a real cause for concern. They also come on the back of worrying GDP figures last week.
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> The UK Government is supporting the Scottish economy with over £1 billion new investment through the autumn statement and spring budget, on top of UK-wide investment in science, R&D and connectivity. We are also building an Industrial Strategy that will address long term economic challenges and drive growth across Scotland and the rest of the UK.
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> The Scottish Government now need to act urgently to secure the Scottish economy and help more people into work. Holyrood has new powers over tax and welfare, with the tools to shape Scotland's economy. Rather than obsess about the constitution, Scottish ministers need to focus all their efforts on strengthening the economy and backing business to create jobs for people across Scotland.

Headline statistics for the December 2016 to February 2017 quarter:

• Employment in Scotland fell by 8,000 over the quarter, and fell by 12,000 over the year, to stand at 2,596,000.

• The Scots employment rate decreased by 0.1 percentage points over the quarter to 73.4 per cent. The rate is below the UK average of 74.6 per cent.

• Unemployment in Scotland fell by 15,000 over the quarter and is down 47,000 over the year. The level now stands at 123,000.

• At 4.5 per cent, the Scottish unemployment rate is below that of the UK at 4.7 per cent.

• Economic activity fell by 24,000 over the quarter and now stands at 2,719,000. Also, the economic activity rate decreased over the year to stand at 77.0 per cent.

• In March 2017, the number of people out of work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance was 47,600 and claimant count, including Universal Credit was 77,000.

Employment

The Labour Force Survey indicates that the number of people in employment in Scotland from December 2016 to February 2017 was 2,596,000. Employment was down by 8,000 compared to the previous three months, and down by 12,000 compared to the same quarter last year. The employment rate was down 0.1 percentage points on the previous quarter, and down by 0.4 percentage points compared the same quarter last year. By comparison, the Scottish employment rate is 73.4 per cent below the UK average of 74.6 per cent.

Unemployment

Unemployment in Scotland was down by 15,000 over the quarter December 2016 to February 2017 at 123,000. The level was down 47,000 on the same quarter last year. The unemployment rate was down 0.5 percentage points on the previous quarter at 4.5 per cent, which is down 1.6 percentage points over the year.

Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit

The number of people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) fell by 100 to 47,600 in March 2017. The level is down by 10,400 on March 2017. The claimant count level (JSA and Universal Credit) is up 2,300 over the month at 77,000 and the rate is up 0.1 percentage points over the month and up 0.1 percentage points over the year to 2.7 per cent.

Economic Activity

The number of economically active (defined as those in employment or ILO unemployed, and seasonally adjusted) in Scotland in the December 2017 to February 2017 quarter was 2,719,000. This was down 24,000 on the previous quarter, and down by 60,000 on prior year levels. Among those aged 16-64 the economic activity rate was 77.0 per cent, down 0.5 percentage points on the previous quarter, and down 1.8 percentage points over the year.

News story: Shanghai-UK collaboration on industry challenges: apply for funds

UK businesses can apply for a share of £5 million to work with partners in

Shanghai on industrial challenges and opportunities.

Innovate UK has up to £5 million to invest in UK businesses to work with partners in Shanghai municipality, People’s Republic of China on collaborative research and development projects that address industrial challenges.

The Science and Technology Commission Department of Shanghai Municipality will allocate funding for research and development companies in China. The programme is being delivered according to the 2016 memorandum of understanding signed between Innovate UK and the department.

Funding opportunities

Projects applying under this competition should meet one of the following 2 areas:

- future cities, in particular solutions that address the challenges brought on by rapid urbanisation, demographic and social change, resource scarcity and climate change
- transformational or disruptive innovation that lead to novel, new products, processes or services. These can be drawn from any technology, engineering or industrial area, but there is a particular interest in healthcare and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and energy and green technology

International collaboration for innovation

Innovation is vital for the future growth of businesses and the economy. Companies that internationalise are also known to have strong growth. With 95% of research, development and innovation taking place outside of the UK, businesses need to access global knowledge, markets, skills and partners.

Shanghai is an historic commercial and financial centre of China. It is a global hub for the life sciences with 13 of the world’s top 20 pharmaceutical companies by turnover with operations in Shanghai, as well as playing a key role in China’s heavy industries and automotive manufacture.

In this competition there should be demonstrable benefits of cooperation between the UK and China for the participants from both countries.

Competition information

- this competition is open, and the deadline for registration is 21 June 2017
- projects must be business-led and involve at least one organisation from the UK and one from Shanghai. Academic and research entities in the UK are eligible to join as partners
- projects should last up to 36 months and range in size up to £500,000
- businesses could attract up to 70% of their project costs

- a webinar briefing event will be held on 21 April 2017 for potential applicants

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Press release: 4 anglers face combined fines of over £2,400 for fishing illegally in Gloucestershire

On the 10 April, Cheltenham Magistrates' Court heard how 4 anglers were caught fishing without a rod licence by Environment Agency officers out on patrol last year. The offences were proved in absence and the 4 fishermen didn't appear in front of magistrates. Each face fines and fees totalling £611.47. And with an annual fishing licence now costing £30 these individuals are probably wishing they'd chosen the cheaper option.

Raymond Cole of Meadowleaze in Gloucester, Tomasz Mizera of The Bailey Lea in Coventry, Matthew Gooding of Garn Road in Nantyglo and Darren Edwards of Verwey Road in Nantyglo were all found guilty for fishing without a licence under Section 27(1)(a) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.

Magistrates heard that Environment Agency enforcement officers found these anglers fishing without a rod licence at pools in Hartpury, and along the River Severn at Tewkesbury.

Stuart Gamble of the Environment Agency said:

> The majority of anglers fish legally and purchase a rod licence. With anglers now being able to buy a licence online for a number of rods to cover any 12 month period it seems ridiculous the minority still risk a fine like these we've seen here.

> The minority of anglers that fail to buy a rod licence are cheating their fellow anglers and the future of the sport. Fishing licence cheats risk a criminal conviction, a significant fine and could lose their fishing equipment.

Money from fishing licence sales is invested in England's fisheries and is used to fund a wide range of projects to improve facilities for anglers including protecting stocks from illegal fishing (including illegal elver patrols), pollution and disease; restoring fish stocks through re-stocking; eradicating invasive species; and fish habitat improvements. Rod licence money is also used to fund the Angling Trust to provide information about fishing and to encourage participation in the sport.

You need a valid Environment Agency rod licence to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel in England. Buying a rod licence is easy, simply visit www.gov.uk/fishing-licences/buy-a-fishing-licence

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing incidents in progress can report it directly to the Environment Agency hotline, 0800 80 70 60. Information on illegal fishing and environmental crime can also be reported anonymously to Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.

Speech: Our FinTech industry can power prosperous future: article by Philip Hammond

From tapping your bank card to pay for your morning coffee, to using your smartphone to check your account in the evening, chances are you're a regular consumer of one of Britain's most ambitious and exciting industries.

This week is International Fintech Week, which is fittingly being held in London – the world's global financial hub – where the ambitions of some of Britain's brightest innovators will take centre stage. Fintech is changing the way we bank and is one of Britain's most exciting industries. It employs more than 60,000 people and contributes £7 billion a year to the UK economy.

The industry provides consumers with better services and more choice, and lowers costs for businesses – we can all be proud of its success and the fact that the UK remains the best place to start and grow a fintech firm anywhere in the world. That isn't just my view but that of independent experts, who rank us No 1. They cite a number of reasons, including our innovative approach to regulation, wider access to financial and technical talent and skills and easier access to capital than any of our rivals.

As we prepare to leave the European Union and forge a bold new role for ourselves in the world, these assets can become an even stronger advantage as we build a global Britain where we can take our talent and ideas to the world.

Today we will bring together more than 100 of the UK's most exciting fintech firms with investors from every continent, so they can showcase their innovative products and investment plans. My message to this audience will be simple. First, because Brexit will open the doors to new opportunities, with enhanced business relationships, new jobs and more investment, British fintechs must not rest on their laurels but seize the enormous opportunities ahead.

There is absolutely no reason why the UK shouldn't be home to even more start-up fintechs, such as the hugely successful British firms Funding Circle and TransferWise, worth more than $1 billion.

We can’t remain No 1 for fintech and the other technologies of the fourth industrial revolution by simply relying on our ingenuity, talent and openness – we have to go out, be proactive and remind the world how we got there and tell them where we are going.

Second, the government will do everything it can to help you to attract the investment you need to grow – and we will make sure that we provide the right kind of support so that Britain’s innovators can seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

As part of this, I am pleased to announce today that Barclays is committing nearly £25 million over the next five years to fund a new fintech site in London. Launching next month, it will be the largest fintech co-working site in Europe, hosting more than 500 people working in 50 fintech start-ups.

Over the past 18 months, we have made it easier for UK fintech firms to expand into Singapore, the Republic of Korea and China with a series of fintech bridges.

We want to increase trade and forge a new relationship with new markets, as I was doing last week in India, where their drive towards a cashless society has accelerated their fintech industry and, as a result, there are huge collaboration opportunities for British firms.

I’m pleased that Britain continues to be at the forefront as the world’s leading innovator in fintech. For 300 years Britain has been at the heart of the global economy and our ability to invent, innovate and export goods and services has been second to none. We led the world into the first industrial revolution and have continued to be at the forefront of global innovation and technology since.

Now, we stand on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution, one that has the potential to transform the global economy. This revolution will be driven by disruptive technology such as artificial intelligence, biotech and fintech.

I am determined that this continues because I know that this is the best way of driving the highly skilled, highly productive economy that we want. We must do better at nurturing and developing the homegrown talent to drive our economy forward in the future.

Our vision of an outward-looking global Britain will deliver the high-skilled, high-wage economy of the future that will power the higher living standards we all want to see for future generations.

That is one of the principal drivers of our modern industrial strategy and it’s why I announced a £23 billion national productivity and investment fund and a new industrial strategy challenge fund to keep the UK at the forefront of disruptive technology.

And it is why, today, I am proud to host the UK’s first International Fintech conference in London.

[News story: Brokenshire: Round table talks paused]

Mr Brokenshire commented:

> The current phase of roundtable talks over the past ten days to help resolve issues will pause for Easter. Bilateral discussions between the parties and with the UK and Irish Governments will continue, in accordance with the three-stranded approach.
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> All the parties have been actively engaged and some further progress has been made, including on the formation of an Executive and on legacy. There is, however, still a lack of agreement between the parties on a small but significant number of issues. The restoration of devolved government remains achievable, but more time and a more focused engagement on the critical issues are required.
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> The parties will have a final opportunity after Easter to reach agreement, building on the discussions which have taken place over the past six weeks.
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> I said that I would use the period up to Easter to determine what legislation should be introduced into Parliament after Easter to address immediate requirements. I have already indicated that I will introduce legislation to set this year’s regional rate to address the urgent need for rates bills to be issued by Councils. In addition, I believe it is also right to introduce provisions that would enable an Executive to be formed in early May should agreement be reached.
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> On 2 March the people of Northern Ireland voted clearly for devolved government. The parties mandated by that election still have a duty to provide the government for which they campaigned. I believe that the outstanding issues between the parties are

surmountable, but if no Executive is formed by early May, I will need to take further steps to ensure Northern Ireland has the political stability it needs.

This is likely to mean, however undesirable, either a second election or a return to decision making from Westminster.