

Speech: Our 18 employment records this year show why we need the Prime Minister's Brexit deal

Opinion editorial by Minister of State for Employment Alok Sharma, published on the Mail Online on 9 December 2018.

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At this critical juncture in our country's history, Brexit dominates, especially in Parliament and the media.

So it is easy to forget the other challenges facing the UK, challenges which have just as big an impact on people's lives and which will continue long after we have left the EU.

Back in 2010, one of those biggest challenges was unemployment. With 2.5 million people without a job, and more redundancies on the way as the financial crisis continued to bite.

Since then, jobs growth has been the biggest success story of the UK economy – creating 3.3 million new jobs as many EU countries struggled with spiralling unemployment with millions of young people being shut out of a job all together.

And today we can say that 2018 has been the best year ever for the UK jobs market. In 2018 we have broken 18 employment records.

From our highest ever employment rate and more people in work than ever before, to record low redundancies and youth unemployment. From record numbers of women, older workers and those from ethnic minority backgrounds in work, to record low gender and ethnic minority pay gaps.

There are fewer households where no-one works than ever before, and fewer children growing up in a workless home. Two years on from the Brexit referendum, the UK jobs market is smashing expectations.

This progress actually matters to people. The prospects of a better future that comes with having a job, knowing that your job is secure, and seeing

your wages rise above inflation – as they have in the UK this year.

One of the 18 records we hit this year was having more people than ever before in full-time work, 23.9 million of them, with almost 2.6 million more than in 2010.

Any employer knows that creating a new full-time role is a big investment. But with policies designed to support business, employers have the confidence to make those investments in jobs – over 400,000 in the last year alone.

If, as a result of the Brexit vote in Parliament, MPs create uncertainty about our country's future direction, suddenly those investments will be harder to make. Or worse, businesses may look to cut back on spending and make redundancies. We may have broken 18 employment records in 2018, but our jobs boost could become a jobs bust.

No surprise then that employers, large and small, and groups representing business like the Federation of Small Businesses and the Confederation of British Industry, have warned against a no-deal Brexit and backed the government's Brexit deal.

I also back the deal. That is because I, like them, see a compromise that works. Not a no-deal that cuts some of our most important trade links, or a second referendum that would open our divisions even further.

There are those, including in Parliament, who dismiss the views of business. That is a mistake. Look at another of our 18 records – private sector employment at an all-time high of over 27 million, with over 380,000 more jobs in the last year alone.

More people in the UK work in the private sector than ever before. Those companies support the government's deal because they know it protects their business, without blocking the possible benefits of Brexit like new trade links.

Some may see opportunity in chaos, but employers do not. Create uncertainty, push back Brexit, seek to harden it or stop it all together and you risk the stable economy that has delivered so many employment records. A strong economy we have worked together so hard to deliver.

It is right that MPs debate Brexit ahead of the big vote and everyone gets a chance to have their say. But, when MPs decide whether to back the deal or not, I hope my colleagues on all sides will listen to the employers of this country and deliver the only deal which gives them the certainty they need to make 2019 another record-breaker. And that is the government's Brexit deal.

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New statistics released last week reveal that British businesses are already benefiting from the ability to trade freely with Canada without paying any duties at Canadian customs.

UK exports of goods to Canada have increased by 13.7% to £6.15 billion in the last 12 months since a new free trade agreement was introduced.

The growth in exports coincides with the provisional implementation of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in September 2017.

It is a significant increase when compared to the 5 years prior to the agreement being introduced, which saw annual trade increase by an average of just 3.9%.

CETA is one of the most extensive EU free trade agreements to date and removes 98% of export duties that are currently in place.

The food and drink industry was previously subject to tariffs of up to 11% but these have now been reduced to zero in most cases.

Meanwhile, auto tariffs are being reduced from 6.1% down to zero over several years so the British motor industry is expected to benefit even more in the years ahead.

Meat exports to Canada increased by 36.3% last year to £2.8m and wine exports grew by 16.6% to £1.75 million.

A significant proportion of UK exports pass through Liverpool Port, which account for 77% meat exports and 47% of wine exports. The city is a major

gateway to Canada thanks to its strategic location and its importance is expected to grow even further as a result to a £400 million expansion project.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

The rapid growth in UK exports to Canada is great news for British people, who are already seeing how our free trade agenda can help to create jobs, boost economic growth and provide more choice for consumers.

CETA is one of the most ambitious free trade agreements and it will eliminate almost every tariff on goods between our two nations, giving a boost to a range of British businesses from our motor industry to our brewers and distillers.

We are committed to transitioning this deal into UK law after we leave the EU and the Department for International Trade is on hand to help even more British businesses establish a strong foothold in the Canadian market.

CETA was formally ratified by the UK last month and has the potential to boost UK GDP by hundreds of millions of pounds in the long-run and create jobs for British and Canadian workers. It has so far been ratified by 12 countries and it will come fully into force once all EU members have ratified it.

The UK and Canadian Prime Ministers have both committed to seeking to seamlessly transition CETA into a bilateral deal that will allow UK and Canadian companies to enjoy as free and frictionless trade as possible after the UK leaves the European Union.

[News story: Typhoons launch with new missile](#)

RAF Typhoons launched from RAF Lossiemouth this morning for the first time with the Meteor Air-to-Air missile in defence of UK airspace during a Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) mission.

This event represents the culmination of many years of research, development and testing to bring this advanced weapon into service on front-line

aircraft.

RAF Typhoons maintain a constant state of readiness to defend the sovereignty of British skies. The introduction of Meteor brings a new and innovative long-range capability and further enhances Typhoon's already potent arsenal. This year they have been scrambled for a variety of incidents including intercepting Russian bombers approaching UK airspace.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This latest missile system demonstrates the next chapter of the Typhoon which will see the jet evolve its ability to target and destroy any airborne threat at great distances. The Meteor missile will provide an unrelenting deterrence to those who wish harm upon the UK and our Armed Forces.

The RAF's prized Typhoon Force is unquestionably now the cornerstone of British and NATO military power. It has proved itself in combat roles over Libya, Iraq and Syria, protecting UK skies and overseas territories, and providing critical support to our NATO Allies in Eastern Europe.

Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

RAF Quick Reaction Alert Typhoon fighters are now armed with the most advanced Air to Air missile in the world, the MBDA developed ramjet powered Meteor. Another huge leap forward in capability for the Typhoon Force, which is proud to continue defending the UK and our allies, 24/7.

RAF Typhoon equipped with Meteor missiles takes off from RAF Lossiemouth.
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The missile system is a worthy investment as it can fly in any weather condition, perform against all current and known future threats; including combat aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles/missiles and will eventually operate from the F-35 Lightning aircraft. Crucially, the Meteor and launch aircraft will be networked by a datalink ensuring highly accurate and intelligent air strikes.

The pilot flying the first Meteor equipped Typhoon said:

The responsibility of flying such a capable platform, armed with this formidable weapon is immense, but the options this gives us in responding to an emergency situation cannot be understated.

Meteor is a state of the art complex weapon developed by a six nation European partnership led by the UK. It is built and manufactured by MBDA in Stevenage and has created 430 jobs across the country.

The RAF will continue to develop the missile through life, in-step with our International Defence and Industrial partners, supporting the UK Aerospace Industry, while maintaining the UK's sovereign 'capability edge'.