

News story: Government sets out plan to see more disabled people in work

The government will help to get more disabled people into work in the next decade, the Prime Minister said today, as a new strategy is launched to break down employment barriers.

Working with industry, government will be taking further steps to help disabled people and people with health conditions get into work, and remain and progress in their roles.

These include new measures such as widening 'fit note' certification and providing dedicated training for work coaches to support people with mental health conditions.

The UK has near record high employment levels with over 32 million people in work, including 600,000 more disabled people in the last four years alone.

The Prime Minister said:

The path a person takes in life and in work should not be dictated by their disability or health condition. Everyone deserves the chance to find a job that's right for them.

I am committed to tackling the injustices facing disabled people who want to work, so that everyone can go as far as their talents will take them.

We recognise the hugely positive impact that working can have on people's health and wellbeing, which is why we are determined to break down the barriers to employment facing disabled people.

This strategy sets out how government, employers and the health service will work together to get more disabled people into employment, and help shift the attitude of business and society to disability.

This is part of building a country that is fit for the future and creating a fairer society, one that will make sure everyone can reach their potential.

The strategy, called 'Improving Lives: the Future of Work, Health and Disability', builds on last year's Work, Health and Disability Green Paper, which called for a comprehensive change to the UK's approach to disability employment.

It sets out the steps government will take to transform disability employment over the next decade and progress so far as we build a country fit for the

future. This includes:

1. Extending fit note certification beyond GPs to a wider group of healthcare professionals, including physiotherapists, psychiatrists and senior nurses, to better identify health conditions and treatments to help workers go back into their jobs faster. Fit notes are designed to help patients develop a return to work plan tailored to their individual needs.
2. Conducting large-scale employment research pilots in West Midlands and Sheffield which will include over 11,000 people. This research will gather evidence to help improve services for those with health conditions, supporting them get into and stay in work, and helping make sure services are accessible and inclusive for all.
3. 2,000 work coaches have received training since 2015 to help them work with benefit claimants with mental health conditions. The government is committed to building on this with the introduction of an enhanced training offer developed with a national mental health charity.
4. £39 million investment to more than double the number of employment advisors in an existing NHS programme treating people with depression and anxiety disorders.
5. Responding in full to the 40 recommendations of the Stevenson/Farmer Review of mental health and employers – including reforming Statutory Sick Pay, improving advice and support for employers and encouraging transparency. The government is also encouraging other employers to take forward these recommendations.
6. Over 5,000 companies have signed up to the Disability Confident scheme to promote disability inclusion and government is encouraging more companies to sign up.
7. Appointing an Expert Working Group on Occupational Health to champion, shape and drive a programme of work to take an in-depth look at the sector.

Work and Pensions Secretary David Gauke said:

Everyone should be able to go as far as their talents can take them, but for too long disabled people and people with health conditions have been held back from getting on in work.

Today we've set out an ambitious 10-year strategy to end this

injustice once and for all. By bringing employers, the welfare system and health services together we're taking significant steps to ensure everyone can reach their potential.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Mental ill health can affect anyone, from any walk of life at any time. For too long society has dictated that people with physical and mental health issues or a disability are a burden. Ensuring that more people with disabilities or long-term health conditions can get into and stay in work would not only enhance their lives, but actually enrich our economy too.

This strategy will help shape the future for hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities and mental health issues as we continue to tackle the stigma that so many people face when trying to get into and progress in work.

Sarah Kaiser, Fujitsu's Diversity and Inclusion lead, said:

It is fantastic to see the Government is committing to seeing more disabled people enter the workplace. Fujitsu has significantly benefited from being Disability Confident, giving us access to untapped pools of talent and enabling us to increase our retention of employees with disabilities.

We have also worked with our employees with disabilities to ensure our products and services become even more accessible, benefitting our customers too. This is not just the right thing for employees, but also significantly helps the employer.

Creating an environment where employees feel comfortable to be completely themselves and tell us if they have a disability allows us to put in place the right adjustments to properly enable them to do their work, whilst providing a working environment that emphasises support. This not only results in increased employee satisfaction but also performance, realising value for the organisation too.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary meets](#)

with African leaders to discuss Zimbabwe

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson will today (Wednesday 29 November) meet leaders from across Africa to discuss developments in Zimbabwe and wider African security and prosperity.

The Foreign Secretary is attending a major summit in Cote D'Ivoire, West Africa, alongside EU and African Union leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and South African President Jacob Zuma.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Recent events in Zimbabwe offer a moment of hope for the country and its people. This is a time to look to the future and to make clear that Britain shares the common vision of a prosperous, peaceful and democratic Zimbabwe.

I am encouraged by President Emmerson Mnangagwa's words so far. During his inauguration speech, he promised to reform the economy and give investors the security of title they need if Zimbabwe is to fulfil its potential and create the jobs that are sorely needed. For as long as the President acts on his words, then Britain is willing to work alongside him and offer all the support we can.

The UK's relationship with Africa and the African Union will continue to go from strength to strength and as we leave the EU I want to work even more closely with my counterparts in the region.

The Foreign Secretary will highlight the role the UK can play across the continent, as a genuine partner for prosperity, working with African nations to achieve political and economic stability.

Mr Johnson will speak with representatives of the 18 African countries which are also members of The Commonwealth ahead of the UK hosted Commonwealth Summit next April. With 60% of the Commonwealth's population under 30, it is particularly important to the UK that the organisation faces up to the challenges of the region and addresses their ambitions for a better life.

He will also raise the issue of the illegal wildlife trade. Tackling this serious crime is a priority for the UK government and we look forward to bringing leading voices together to work towards new solutions at the London 2018 Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in October next year.

On the illegal wildlife trade, the Foreign Secretary added:

Discussing how we eradicate the illegal wildlife trade is also a top priority for me in my talks with African Union countries. It is not only a deplorable trade that endangers some of our most iconic species of wildlife, but is also a lucrative source of income for transnational criminals which brings misery to local communities.

Further information

Press release: Minister Field summons North Korean Ambassador after missile launch

Following North Korea's ballistic missile launch on 28 November, FCO Minister for Asia and Pacific Mark Field summoned the DPRK Ambassador to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Following the meeting, Minister Field said:

I summoned the North Korean Ambassador to the Foreign Office to make clear to him our condemnation of this latest ballistic missile test.

North Korea claims it wants to bring security and prosperity to its people. But its actions are creating only insecurity and deepening its isolation.

The UK will continue to work with our partners and allies for a diplomatic solution. I urge the regime to abandon its illegal pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missiles and return to dialogue.

Further information

Statement to Parliament: Hydraulic fracturing consent

My Rt Hon Friend Greg Clark (Secretary of State for Business, Energy and

Industrial Strategy) has today laid before Parliament a Direction ensuring that the Oil and Gas Authority consults the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on onshore hydraulic fracturing operations.

Under Section 4A of the Petroleum Act 1998 (inserted by Section 50 of the Infrastructure Act 2015), operators who wish to conduct associated hydraulic fracturing must apply for a Hydraulic Fracturing Consent from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Hydraulic Fracturing Consent was introduced in the Infrastructure Act 2015 as an additional step to the existing regulatory and permitting regime.

However, it does not apply to wells drilled before the 2015 Act came to force and these are not captured by the requirement to seek a Hydraulic Fracturing Consent.

Today's Direction closes this loophole and ensures that the same approach for consent is taken for all relevant hydraulic fracturing operations, including where the associated well was drilled prior to the 2015 Act coming into force.

For these operations, operators will be expected to meet the same set of standards as required to obtain Hydraulic Fracturing Consent, laid out in the Infrastructure Act 2015.

The government has been clear that shale development must be safe and environmentally sound.

The UK has a robust regulatory system which provides a comprehensive regime for exploratory activities and this direction will ensure that all relevant hydraulic fracturing operations are subject to this final step of scrutiny.

News story: UK TROOPS AWARDED UN MEDALS FOR SOUTH SUDAN PEACEKEEPING MISSION

MEDALS have been awarded to 106 UK troops currently deployed on Op TRENTON, the UK contribution to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

There are nearly 400 troops deployed in the world's newest country, split across three locations. Soldiers from the 32 Engineer Regiment led Task Force were recognised for their service to the UN by the Special Representative of the Secretary General Mr David Shearer on parade in Malakal. He said:

I would like to recognise the commendable efforts of everyone here

on parade and honour your dedicated service here in South Sudan. Your efforts and professionalism are highly regarded and you make a valuable contribution to UNMISS. Wear these medals as the proud and worthy ambassadors of your country and of the United Nations that you are.

The UK Engineering and Medical Task Force has made a vital contribution to supporting the UN mission through improving infrastructure in the form of helicopter landing sites, runways, jetty and drainage improvements and staff accommodation builds. They have also been staffing the UK built Level 2 field hospital which provides essential healthcare to over 1,800 UN civilian and military staff based in Bentiu.

Air Vice Marshall Gary Waterfall, Chief of Staff for Joint Operations, also presented medals and thanked the soldiers for their work which represents the UK's renewed contribution to UN peacekeeping operations. He said:

We are dipping our toe back into the peacekeeping waters. But this moment marks that we have made it a step further, with our first full rotation earning their medals. I am proud of this achievement, and proud of all of you on parade that have made it possible.

The Commanding Officer of the UK Task Force is Royal Engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop. She said:

Today is about our people and providing the recognition that all our soldiers deserve; not just those visible on the parade square right now, but those who are in the sangars and behind the scenes covering essential duties to protect and sustain us.

The Task Force has faced some unique challenges during its deployment which began at the start of the wet season. However, through innovation and teamwork, much needed improvements to UN infrastructure in both Malakal and Bentiu have been made. These will have a lasting impact on the mission and the next engineering contingent has been set up well for success next year.

The current contingent will remain in South Sudan over the Christmas period, continuing to enable the mission to protect civilians and build durable peace. They will return home to their families in January 2018.