

News story: UK and Germany work towards stronger defence relationship



Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson with German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen

The pair and their teams met to discuss strengthening defence ties. The German Defence Minister and Gavin Williamson also took the opportunity to meet a group of German junior officers, who have been learning about UK defence at the Ministry of Defence.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The UK and Germany face the same intensifying threats to our way of life and we work closely together to protect our citizens from harm.

Germany is one of our closest allies and I look forward to even closer cooperation.

The visit follows on from increased cooperation between the two countries. February saw the successful Ministerial Equipment Capability Cooperation talks in Berlin and the latest annual UK-Germany Army Staff Talks, which took place in London.

Germany was formally recognised as a 'tier one' defence ally in November 2015's Strategic Defence and Security Review. The country has also recognised the UK as a key defence partners in its equivalent review.

Both nations have a strong history of working together in NATO and as part of the Counter-Daesh coalition, working together to tackle terrorist threats, build allies' capacity and boost Europe's security.

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[News story: Welsh rail services set to be devolved following historic agreement](#)

The transfer of rail services to the Welsh government has taken a significant step forward with the laying of a draft order in Parliament.

The draft order was laid before Parliament today (28 February 2018) and will, subject to approval from MPs, Lords and the Privy Council, devolve the procurement and management of Wales and Borders franchise train services within Wales. This follows detailed discussions between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government on how powers will be devolved to Welsh ministers.

The agreement also takes into account the fact that many of the franchise services operate on both sides of the border between England and Wales and includes safeguards to protect all passengers using these routes.

Rail Minister Jo Johnson said:

This is a positive and significant step in the franchise devolution process and is an example of the effective cooperation between the UK and Welsh governments.

The devolution of these powers delivers on recommendations made by the Commission on Devolution in Wales and demonstrates the commitment we made as a government in the 2015 St David's Day Agreement.

Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport Ken Skates said:

I welcome this recognition of the extensive nature of the cross-border services – and services wholly within England – provided by the Wales and Borders franchise and the need for appropriate accountability for rail operations on each side of the border.

It will be important for devolution of funding for Network Rail to be delivered in the future and I will continue dialogue with the Department for Transport to that end.

As well as continuing with present franchise funding arrangements, the UK government will also provide an extra £125 million towards upgrading the Valley Lines, part of the Welsh Government's metro project in South Wales.

The draft Welsh Ministers (Transfer of Functions) (Railways) Order 2018 was laid before Parliament following formal approval by Welsh ministers. It will go before the Commons and Lords for scrutiny.

[News story: Low Pay Commission visits programme 2018](#)

Date	Location
25-26 April	Kendal and South Lakeland
23-24 May	Barnstaple and North Devon
13-14 June	Newry, Northern Ireland
13-14 June	Perth, Scotland
4-5 July	Anglesey, Wales
8-9 August	Birmingham

The LPC organises an annual programme of visits to gather evidence in support of our recommendations to government. The visits are attended by members of our Commission and Secretariat. We want to hear first hand evidence from employers, workers and anyone else with a view on the National Living and Minimum Wage rates and their effects.

We can host meetings in the locations we visit, but it is also extremely useful for us to visit businesses and workers at their place of work to see the effects of the minimum wage 'on the ground'. So, we would be delighted if you would like to host us and show us around your business, or arrange for us to meet workers.

For more information on why we have chosen these visit locations, read our [blog](#).

The Low Pay Commission's purpose is to provide advice to the Government on the rates of the National Living Wage and the other National Minimum Wages, as well as other related issues.

Click the link at the top of the page to email and arrange a meeting with LPC Commissioners, or call on 020 7215 8772.

All the minimum wage rates will increase on 1 April – see table below for rates.

National Minimum Wage rates

Minimum Wage rate	Current rate (hourly)	Rate from 1 April 2018
National Living Wage	£7.50	£7.83
21-24 Year Old Rate	£7.05	£7.38

Minimum Wage rate	Current rate (hourly)	Rate from 1 April 2018
18-20 Year Old Rate	£5.60	£5.90
16-17 Year Old Rate	£4.05	£4.20
Apprentice Rate	£3.50	£3.70
Accommodation offset	£6.40	£7.00

[Guidance: Transferring from the further education to the higher education sector](#)

Sets out the detailed criteria and process for further education corporations seeking to apply to transfer to the higher education sector.

[Guidance: Designation as an institution eligible for HEFCE funding](#)

Sets out the process and detailed criteria for higher education providers seeking to apply for designation as an institution eligible to receive HEFCE funding.