

# [News story: Environment Secretary opens £40 million fund to boost farm productivity](#)

Farmers will get a £40 million productivity boost today as the Environment Secretary Michael Gove announces the opening of a new grants scheme for investment in cutting edge technology and new equipment.

Speaking at the 2017 World Dairy Summit in Belfast, the Secretary of State will invite farmers and food processors to apply for grants under the Countryside Productivity scheme.

Under the scheme, grants are available to help livestock, dairy, arable and horticultural farmers improve farm productivity through investing in new technology, such as robotics, to reduce cost or improve product quality. The funding can be used on diverse investments, from robotic milking machines to green technology.

The scheme also offers funds for farmers and food processors to invest in new equipment and machinery to improve the processing of milk, meat and fruit.

Speaking ahead of the summit, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Farmers truly are the backbone of our rural economy and as the original friends of the earth, we want to support them to grow more, sell more and export more great British produce – all while doing good for our environment.

This new funding is a wonderful opportunity for our farmers and food processors to invest in the technology they need to boost productivity, competition and, of course, sustainability as a key factor in future proofing our world leading food and farming industry.

The Countryside Productivity scheme is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and this latest announcement is the second phase of the [Large Grants scheme](#) announced in July 2017.

The first phase of the scheme included a £6 million fund for Improving Forestry Productivity and a £14 million scheme for Water Resource Management.

The Government also recently announced a £30 million [Rural Broadband Infrastructure grant](#) and a new [Bovine TB Advisory Service](#) supported by more than £1 million of RDPE funding.

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## **Press release: Chemical disposal update – Sunday 29 October**

Work to safely dispose of chemicals at Sellafield continued this weekend and will continue tomorrow.

Any disposals will take place during daylight hours, may be audible off-site and will be in line with best practice and chemical disposal regulations.

We have provided updates directly to staff and stakeholders in the immediate vicinity of the site.

With the exception of the laboratory where the chemicals are being retrieved from, the site will continue to operate as normal.

### Key facts

- The chemicals are in sealed glass bottles of good condition.
- The chemicals are being disposed of appropriately.
- The materials involved are solvents which are widely used in industry.
- The Explosive Ordnance Disposal team deal with hundreds of these issues every year, recovering chemicals from science laboratories in places like schools, universities and hospitals.
- Because this is happening on the Sellafield site we exercise extreme caution and leave nothing to chance.

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## **News story: Fundraising Event to End Polio in Afghanistan**

To mark World Polio Day, and to raise money for this worthy cause, the UK Humanitarian Team and The Rotary Club held a cultural event at the British Embassy.

The slogan of this year's Polio Eradication Campaign is "We are so close to eradicating Polio forever"

Speaking at the event, the Afghan Minister of Public Health Dr. Ferozuddin Feroz said:

We have worked very hard to reach every child, wherever he or she

lives. I would like to thank my frontline workers and our partners, who have worked tirelessly to eradicate this cruel disease.

The money collected by The Rotary Club of Kabul City will help vaccinate as many as 32,000 children in Afghanistan and will also assist with Polio Awareness Campaigns which will be launched across the country to raise awareness of the measures needed to tackle this horrendous disease in remote districts and villages.

Afghan Handicrafts

Afghan Artwork

The British Ambassador, Sir Nicholas Kay said:

The UK is donating £400 million of support, for eradicating polio in the final three countries where this disease is present – Nigeria, Pakistan and of course Afghanistan. I'm extremely pleased that today's event is focused on such an important challenge of our time –eradicating the cruel disease of polio, that just has no place in the 21st century.

There are still seven cases of Polio in Afghanistan, reduced from 13 in 2016.

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## **Press release: Clampdown on child maintenance cheats**

New powers to stop parents avoiding paying child maintenance that they owe have been announced.

If a parent owes child maintenance, deductions to recover that debt can currently only be made from a bank or building society account held solely by them. So a small minority of parents are cheating their way out of supporting their children by putting their money into a joint account with a partner.

New laws will be brought in to allow deductions to be made from joint accounts in order to recover child maintenance arrears.

It is believed closing this loophole could stop a number of parents getting away with not paying their child maintenance each year – leading to more than £390,000 additional child maintenance being collected.

Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance Caroline Dinéage

said:

Our priority is for children to get the support they need. Only a small minority of parents try to cheat their way out of paying towards their children and this new power will be another tool to tackle those who do.

The government's response to a public consultation on joint account deductions has been published today. This sets out how deduction orders against joint accounts will work and the safeguards that will be in place to protect the other holder of the joint account.

These include:

- a deduction order only being imposed on a joint account when the paying parent does not have their own account, or there is not enough money in their own account
- only funds belonging to the paying parent being targeted, as before a deduction order is made on a joint account, data on that bank account will be collected and bank statements examined to establish which money in the account belongs to the paying parent
- existing safeguards already in place for deduction orders for child maintenance will apply to this new power, including the maximum deduction rate on regular orders being set at 40% of the paying parent's weekly income
- both account holders will be given the right to make their case before a deduction order is made

The new power will come into effect early next year.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5130

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## [News story: Prime Minister announces new drive to end the gender pay gap](#)

The Prime Minister announces new drive to improve workplace equality – calling on more companies to report their gender pay gap and take action to close it.

New figures [published this week by the ONS](#) show the UK's overall gender pay gap rising marginally to 18.4%, but the gap for full-time workers falling to a record low – from 9.4% in 2016 to 9.1% in 2017.

To close the gender pay gap further, the Prime Minister is calling on companies to:

- improve the pipeline to ensure progress on female representation at senior levels, including supporting women to progress to middle management and offering return to work schemes
- publish their gender pay gap data, including companies with fewer than 250 employees
- make flexible working a reality for all employees by advertising all jobs as flexible from Day 1, unless there are solid business reasons not to

As part of the commitment to drive forward workplace equality, the Women's Business Council which the Prime Minister established as Home Secretary in 2012, will be advising her on progress and good practice in business. The council will also be providing recommendations in key areas including middle management, flexible working, working parents and return-to-work schemes.

The Prime Minister said:

Tackling injustices like the gender pay gap is part of building a country that works for everyone.

Already many of the UK's top companies are leading the way in making sure everyone's contributions to the workplace are valued equally, and it is encouraging news that the gap has fallen this year for full-time workers.

But the gender pay gap isn't going to close on its own – we all need to be taking sustained action to make sure we address this.

We need to see a real step-change in the number of companies publishing their gender pay data and offering progression and flexibility for all employees.

That's why today I am calling on more businesses, both small and large, to take action to make sure the gender pay gap is eliminated once and for all.

The government introduced a legal requirement for all employers with over 250 employees to publish their gender pay and bonus data by April 2018.

Top companies including Weetabix, Fujitsu, TSB, Virgin Media and SSE have already reported their gender pay gap and have said how they will take action to close it. The Prime Minister is now calling on more employers to follow their lead, including encouraging businesses with fewer than 250 employees to voluntarily publish their pay gap too.

Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening said:

It is simply good business sense to recognise the enormous potential of women and to take action to nurture and progress female talent.

That is why we have introduced a legal requirement for all large employers to publish their gender pay and bonus data by April 2018. Employers now need to get on with publishing their pay gap. By shining a light on where there are gaps, they can take action and make sure that we are harnessing the talents and skills of men and women.

The gender pay gap in the UK has come down from 21.9% in 2007 and 27.5% of FTSE100 board members are now women, up from 12.5% in 2011.

The UK is already a world leader in this field and today's announcement builds on:

- the work to get 33 per cent of women on boards by 2020 and eliminate all-male boards in the FTSE 350
- the system of shared parental leave introduced in April 2015, under which mothers can choose to end their maternity leave early and working parents can then decide how they want to share the remaining leave
- the rules on flexible working introduced in June 2014, which extend the right to request flexible working to all employees and place a duty on employers to consider all requests for flexible working in a reasonable manner.

By closing gender pay gaps in work McKinsey estimates that we would add £150 billion to the UK economy by 2025.

## **Background information**

Find out [more about the government's drive to close the gender pay gap](#) including the requirement for all employers with more than 250 to publish their gender pay and bonus data.

The ONS figures show the gender pay gap for all employees has marginally increased from 18.2% in 2016 to 18.4% in 2017. This is the net impact of both the full-time and part-time gender pay gaps moving closer to zero, together with [an increase in the proportion of employees working full-time versus part-time](#).

The full-time gender pay gap was 9.1% and the part-time GPG was -5.1%. These compare to 9.4% and -6.1% respectively for 2016. Similar year-on-year increases have occurred in previous years, for example, in 2013 and 2015, but the longer-term trend is downward, from 27.5% in 1997 and 21.9% in 2007. All figures were calculated from a snapshot taken in April of the relevant year.