Press release: UK’s artisan chocolates an international favourite this Easter

Britain’s independent chocolatiers are making the most of the growing global demand for their tasty treats this Easter.

Last year over £680 million of chocolate from the UK was snapped up by foreign consumers, who are showing an increasing taste for quality products. Exports have risen significantly from £370 million in 2010 – an 84% rise.

The number of independent chocolatiers in the UK has also grown in recent years, with more artisanal and specialised products being launched to meet consumer demand – both here and abroad. The manufacture of cocoa, chocolate and sugar confectionery is now worth £1.1 billion to the UK economy.

The government is supporting many small businesses to taking advantage of this by helping them explore export opportunities in the 149 worldwide markets that currently import UK chocolate.

Food and Farming Minister George Eustice said:

> There has been a huge growth in the number of independent chocolatiers in the UK and they are very adept at creating delicious products that are shaping consumer tastes around the world. There are great opportunities to increase our food and drink exports and increasing market access around the world is a major focus for government.

One business taking advantage of the increasing global demand for Britain’s high quality, artisan chocolates is Amelia Rope Chocolate, which started as a kitchen business in 2007 creating truffles and chocolate-dipped crystallised flora and now sells products in Hong Kong and Asia. The company’s hand-foiled salted butter caramel Easter eggs will be served to business class customers on the Eurostar over the coming weekend.

Founder Amelia Rope has a passion for creating chocolate using sustainable ingredients and using recyclable material in her packaging – this year her Easter eggs are being sold in biodegradable bags rather than large amounts of cardboard and plastic.

Founder Amelia Rope said:

> Exporting is vital for me and my brand. It can be hard work but I am quite resourceful. I’m excited about now expanding into the US and the Middle East.

The Grown Up Chocolate Company, founded in 2010 and now with 37 employees, also benefits from exporting its indulgent versions of childhood favourites overseas.

Last year the company had an annual turnover of just over £2million and they are hoping to expand to a larger site.

James Ecclestone, of the Grown Up Chocolate Company, said:

> Exports are a key part of what we do and represent over a quarter of our business.
>
> Our products are sold as far away as Australia, and we are keen for more people around the world to enjoy our artisanal, indulgent chocolates.

The Government, and its team of trade experts, continues to encourage and support UK business as they consider launching into overseas markets or expanding their current global customer base.

This is complemented by the government’s Food is GREAT campaign, which highlights the success of current exporters and showcases the UK’s top quality food and drink.

The Department for International Trade is currently working with business on the development of a new Export Strategy, which will explore the barriers to exporting and identify the best ways in which government can help drive and support UK companies to increase exporting activity and unlock high potential opportunities overseas.

Baroness Fairhead, Minister of State for Trade and Export Promotion, said:

> It is great to see British businesses exporting increasing amounts of chocolate around the world as they seek to meet the ever-growing demand for our produce.
>
> Export support is a key way that the Government can help businesses succeed and grow, which is why I am currently developing a new Export Strategy to break down the barriers companies face when doing business on the international stage.

Top 5 ways the government supports businesses to export:

Press release: Government crackdown on litter louts

The maximum on-the-spot fine for littering and graffiti almost doubles from £80 to £150. For the first time, local authorities can also use these littering penalties against vehicle owners if it can be proved litter was thrown from their car.

Keeping the country's streets clean cost local councils almost £700 million last year. Much of this is avoidable litter, and money that could be better spent in the community.

The Government is clear however that councils must not abuse the power to impose penalties. Councils should take into account local circumstances, like local ability to pay, when setting the level for these penalties. Government guidance is available to ensure the new powers are used in a fair and proportionate way by local authorities.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

> These new fines will tackle antisocial behaviour by hitting litter louts in the pocket, whether it's litter that is thrown from a vehicle or dropped in the street.
>
> Littering is a scourge on our environment and we waste taxpayers' money cleaning it up – funds which could be better spent in the community.
>
> We want to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it, and I encourage everyone to take responsibility for their litter and recycle more.

Edmund King OBE, president of motoring organisation the AA said:

> There is no excuse for car litter louts. Tossing rubbish from vehicles spoils the environment, costs millions and puts road workers' lives at risk when they have to clear up. The majority of our members support higher fines for littering and we welcome these steps to tackle this unnecessary problem. It is not difficult for car occupants to bag it and bin it.
>
> When AA employees have conducted litter picks and our members have surveyed local roadside litter, we are always astonished at the number of plastic bottles, take-away wrappers and even kitchen sinks discarded at the roadside.

The changes to penalties for littering follow a public consultation as part of the launch of England's first ever Litter Strategy in April 2017 which showed nearly 9 out of 10 respondents were in favour of increasing fixed penalties for littering.

These measures come on top of cross government work to protect the environment. On the same day, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is implementing an extension to the landfill tax to cover unauthorised waste sites, showing that whether people are littering on a small or a large scale the penalties are high.

Today's announcement builds on a range of new measures to tackle waste including banning microbeads, proposals to extend the 5p plastic bag charge, and plans to introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers.

The move builds on Government's wider Litter Strategy for England as well as the recent launch of the 25 Year Environment Plan setting out how Government will protect and enhance our natural environment.

- The full version of the government's Litter Strategy is available here
- The maximum on-the-spot fine local authorities can issue for dropping litter has nearly double, from £80 to £150
- The default penalty has increased from £75 to £100, and from April 2019 the minimum penalty will increase from £50 to £65
- The cost of £682m in 2016/17 for street cleaning is from Official local Government returns to DCLG
- Research on one in five admitting to having dropped litter in the past is from Keep Britain Tidy – Litter Droppers Segmentation research (2010)
- For further information please contact Defra press office on 020 8225 7317 or out of hours on 0345 051 8486

Press release: New crackdown on rogue agents to protect renters and leasehold homeowners

- Independent regulator and code of practice for letting and managing agents
- Easier way to help leaseholders challenge unfair fees and service charges
- Possible prosecution for those who severely breach the code

Almost 9 million households in England's private rented and leasehold sectors will benefit from stronger protections against rogue letting and managing agents thanks to new government proposals announced today (1 April 2018).

With thousands of renters and leaseholders suffering at the hands of rogue agents every day from unexpected costs, deliberately vague bills or poor quality repairs, a new mandatory code of practice is proposed to stop managing and letting agents from flouting the law.

To further professionalise both sectors, letting and managing agents will be required to obtain a nationally recognised qualification to practice, with at least 1 person in every organisation required to have a higher qualification.

A new independent regulator responsible for working practices of agents will be given strong powers of enforcement for those who break the rules – and agents who fail to comply will not be permitted to trade. Criminal sanctions could also be brought in for those who severely breach the code.

Housing Minister Heather Wheeler said:

> Most property agents take a thorough and professional approach when carrying out their business, but sadly some do not.
>
> By introducing new standards for the sector, we will clamp down on the small minority of agents who abuse the system so we can better protect tenants and leaseholders who find themselves at the end of a raw deal.

Other proposals to be brought in under the code include:

- a new system to help leaseholders challenge unfair fees including service charges
- support for leaseholders to switch their managing agents where they perform poorly or break the terms of their contract
- a requirement for all letting and managing agents to undertake continuing professional development and training

The new code will be developed by a working group comprising representatives of letting, managing and estate agents, as well as tenants and regulation experts. The group will be established as soon as possible and is expected to draw up the final proposals in early 2019.

The group will also look in greater depth at unfair additional charges for freehold and leaseholders and whether they should be capped or banned. This includes the use of restrictive covenants, leasehold restrictions and administration charges.

The government has also published its response to its consultation on the introduction of mandatory Client Money Protection schemes for letting agents, with legislation to be brought forward to introduce privately-led schemes and civil penalties of up to £30,000 for agents who fail to comply with the scheme.

According to industry estimates, £2.7 billion in client funds is held by letting agents at any one time. Making this scheme mandatory is vital to ensure every agent is offering the same level of protection, giving tenants and landlords the financial protection that they deserve, and will mean they are reimbursed if their letting agent is fraudulent or goes bankrupt.

The Secretary of State announced his intention to regulate letting agents in October 2017 followed by a 6-week call for evidence to which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has responded to today.

Government announced its intention in March 2017 to make members of an approved Client Money Protection scheme mandatory.

The consultation closed on 13 December 2017 and received 117 responses from a range of stakeholders.

Secondary legislation on Client Money Protection will be laid in Parliament in due course.

Membership of a Client Money Protection scheme is currently voluntary with approximately 60% of agents signed up.

Press release: New powers model for Wales comes into force on 1 April 2018

- The reserved powers model provides a clear boundary between reserved and devolved matters
- Welsh devolution will be strengthened through further powers coming on stream for the Assembly and Welsh Ministers

A new reserved powers model of devolution in Wales comes into force today (1 April), putting more decisions into the hands of Welsh Ministers, giving them important new levers to grow the Welsh economy and to deliver better public services across Wales.

The new model places Welsh devolution on a firmer foundation, making clearer what is devolved, and the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales, and what is reserved – and the responsibility of Parliament.

The Assembly and Welsh Ministers will also today gain a raft of new powers to make a real difference to the lives of people in Wales, including over bus and taxi services, Welsh ports and elections to the Assembly and local government. The new reserved powers model will take effect on at the same day time as the first new devolved Welsh taxes enabled by the last Wales Act, and just a year before the Assembly and Welsh Ministers take responsibility for a portion of income tax.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

> The new reserved powers model for Wales provides more transparent government, with more clearly defined responsibilities for both the UK and devolved level. Taken with the fiscal framework – which gives funding certainty for Wales over the longer-term – Welsh devolution is now on a strong footing to deliver for the people of Wales.
>
> And in changing the model of devolution today, we are also seeing the devolution of wide-ranging new powers to the National Assembly.
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> From decisions over ports, taxis and bus regulation and teachers' pay, to decisions on the electoral system for the Assembly and Welsh local government, all these decisions will now be taken in the Senedd.
>
> To me that is responsible devolution; that is real devolution and I think that is vital for Wales and for the UK. The Welsh Government now needs to be innovative with the opportunities these new powers provide and deliver the improvements in devolved services that the people of Wales deserve.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Some parts of the Wales Act 2017 are already in force, including provisions that: – reaffirm the government's commitment to the permanence of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government; – remove the requirement for a referendum before the devolution of income tax to Wales; and – double (to £1 billion) the amount Welsh Ministers can borrow to fund capital expenditure.

Last year, the UK Government and Welsh Government introduced a water protocol for England and Wales which will safeguard water resources, water supply and water quality for consumers on both sides of the border.

Press release: Children's Funeral Fund for England

Under the scheme, parents will no longer have to meet the costs of burials or cremations. Fees will be waived by all local authorities and met instead by government funding.

Every year an estimated 4,350 children die under the age of 18 and grieving parents can face thousands in council fees for burial or cremation costs. There is also considerable variation in charges, with some councils waiving fees altogether.

The intervention brings England in line with Wales and follows a cross-party campaign by bereaved parents to remove fees for funerals for those under the age of 18.

Theresa May today praised the “dignity and strength” of Swansea East MP Carolyn Harris who been at the forefront of the cross-party Parliamentary campaign following the death of her eight-year-old son Martin.

The Prime Minister said:

> No parent should ever have to endure the unbearable loss of a child – a loss that no amount of time will ever truly heal.
>
> But in the raw pain of immediate loss, it cannot be right that grieving parents should have to worry about how to meet the funeral costs for a child they hoped to see grow into adulthood.
>
> I have been incredibly moved by the dignity and strength of campaigners like Carolyn Harris, who lost her own son Martin when he was just eight years old. Carolyn has passionately argued for a Children’s Funeral Fund to spare grieving families the burden of meeting funeral costs.
>
> In the darkest moment of any parent’s life there is little light – but there can be support.
>
> That is why I have asked for the Children’s Funeral Fund to be set up in England. For Carolyn, in memory of her son Martin, and in support of all those parents overwhelmed by such harrowing loss.

The intervention follows government support for Kevin Hollinrake’s Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill for parents who lose a child under the age of 18.