

Speech: IMF Article IV Press Conference: Chancellor's opening remarks

I am delighted to welcome Christine Lagarde back to the Treasury this morning (20 December 2017), to present the conclusions of the IMF's annual Article IV assessment of the UK economy.

I had the pleasure of meeting the team during their visit and I thank them for their work.

The assessment plays an important role in providing independent scrutiny of our economy, and valuable challenge and support for our economic policymaking.

And this year's assessment comes at an important juncture for the UK economy.

At my [recent Budget](#) I reported on an economy that continues to grow...

...that has delivered the lowest unemployment in 40 years...

...and that continues to confound those who seek to talk it down.

But there are many challenges we need to address if we are to tackle low productivity growth and go on raising living standards...

...to deliver a new partnership with our European neighbours that supports jobs and prosperity...

...to seize the opportunities of the rapid technological change that is going on across the world...

...and build a Britain that is fit for the future.

And today's IMF report identifies some challenges, and potential solutions, for building this stronger economy.

First, the IMF urges us to go on rebuilding our fiscal buffers against future shocks.

We've made good progress in repairing our public finances and reducing the highest budget deficit in our peacetime history by three quarters, to 2.3%.

But at 87% of GDP our debt is still too high, and so we remain committed to our fiscal rules, which are set to see debt falling next year.

And I welcome the IMF's endorsement of our fiscal plan – which takes a balanced approach to reducing the deficit and investing to raise productivity.

Second, the IMF highlights the significant productivity challenge that the UK economy faces.

This is a common challenge across advanced economies, but the gap between UK productivity and the rest of the G7 has widened.

When I took this job, I made it the central mission of the Treasury to tackle this challenge head-on.

And since the last Article IV assessment I have established, and expanded, the National Productivity Investment Fund to deliver over £31 billion of investment targeted at transport, broadband, science and innovation.

In my [Autumn Budget](#) I took action to put the UK at the forefront of the technologies of the future...

...investing over [£500 million in artificial intelligence, 5G, and driverless and electric vehicles](#).

We've launched radical reforms to our technical education system, to give people the skills they'll need to thrive in a modern economy.

And I was pleased to see the IMF recognise that alongside our prudent management of the public finances...

...public investment is set to rise further over the medium term...

...reaching its highest sustained level in forty years.

Third, the IMF note the regional disparities in productivity within the UK.

And it is true that if we are to build an economy that is fit for the future...

...then we have to get all parts of the UK firing on all cylinders...

...and our [modern Industrial Strategy](#) sets out our long-term plan to boost productivity throughout the UK.

The IMF recommend a greater role for local decision making, to better tailor policies to economic conditions.

We are devolving powers to elected mayors across the country...

...and at the Budget I announced a [new £1.7 billion Transforming Cities Fund](#)...

...half of which will go to the six areas with elected metro mayors...

...to deliver better transport connections across our regional cities.

Finally, the IMF recognise the potential of Brexit to reshape the structure of the UK economy.

...and they welcome the progress we have made in the negotiations so far.

The UK and the EU have shown what can be achieved by commitment and perseverance on both sides...

...and we are well on the way to delivering a Brexit that protects jobs and prosperity...

...and prepares Britain for the opportunities ahead.

As the negotiations with the EU enter the second phase...

...it is imperative that we move on with discussions to secure a smooth and orderly withdrawal from the European Union.

The IMF report notes that “early agreement on a transition period would avoid a cliff edge exit in March 2019 and reduce the uncertainty facing firms and households”.

I agree.

One of the biggest boosts we can provide to the economy...

...of both the UK and the EU...

...is making early progress on delivering certainty and clarity about our future relationship...

...with a time-limited implementation period agreed at the earliest opportunity...

...when we have left the EU and therefore will be outside the EU Customs Union and the Single Market...

...but during which we will replicate the effects of the Customs Union and the Single Market...

...with reciprocal access to each other's markets...

...and a harmonised customs arrangement, ensuring a low friction border.

Giving businesses continuity, and certainty, to plan and invest with confidence.

I'll end my remarks there, and finish by thanking Christine Lagarde and the IMF for their continued scrutiny and support.

As ever Christine, we value your advice and look forward to studying the conclusions of your report in more detail when it is published in the Spring.

I now hand over to Christine Lagarde who will introduce the report and answer your questions.

Thank you.

Press release: Independent review calls for greater community use to give church buildings a sustainable future

Churches should be opened up for new and different uses by communities to help build a more sustainable future for the buildings, an independent report has recommended.

[The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#) says that congregations should be empowered to involve more local people in enjoying, valuing, using and caring for their churches.

The review panel, chaired by Bernard Taylor and made up of representatives from the Church of England and heritage bodies, was set up last year to find new ways to maintain Church of England buildings and look at the potential for different funding models.

A total of 12,200 Church of England churches are listed and since 1999 there has been £2.6 billion invested in repairs and new build projects, with Government and lottery sources providing £810 million of this investment.

Bernard Taylor, Chairman of the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review, said:

Church buildings are an important and a much-loved part of our national heritage and form an integral part of our sense of identity and community. However, despite the hard work of many groups and volunteers around the country, they face complex problems of maintenance and repair, and are not always well used and supported.

Increased use and helping communities in their broadest form to see the value and potential of the local church is the key to the church building becoming more self-sustaining and ultimately ensuring its long term survival. The solution must be local and there is no instant solution, but these recommendations represent the next steps towards a more sustainable future for these important buildings.

Heritage Minister John Glen said:

I welcome this report and want to thank Bernard Taylor and the

whole panel for their work. Our church buildings are a major part of our heritage and it is vital that they are cared for and protected. This report has shown how valued these buildings are and how many thousands of volunteers work so hard on their upkeep.

This review is an important first step to building a more sustainable future for thousands of church buildings across the country, and we will look at these recommendations carefully.

The review panel welcomed the work by the Church of England to simplify its processes and make it easier for churches to get consent to share use of their buildings. Guidance is also being prepared by the Church of England to support models of community ownership and responsibility such as the creation of local Trusts and Friends.

The Rt Revd John Inge, Bishop of Worcester and lead bishop on cathedrals and church buildings, said:

I welcome the findings of this Review. Our 16,000 churches are the jewel in the crown of our built heritage. They exist, as they always have done, to serve their communities. This is seen through daily acts of worship, celebrations of the joys of life and commemorations of its sorrows. They are, though, not just places of worship for their communities: they are social hubs for people of all ages, spaces to offer hospitality and vital services to the vulnerable; churches increasingly are the glue in community life.

I have enormous respect for the millions of volunteers and church workers who through the generations have cared for our churches.

The strategy proposed in this report to support these vital buildings will, I pray, help to protect their fabric and equip them to serve anew in the future.

The Review makes clear how churches and cathedrals are vital community assets in need of support nationally. We look forward to working with funding partners to put the proposals into place.

The review panel highlighted the best practice of many churches and of volunteers around the country, with buildings adapted and used for cafes, playgroups, and in some cases NHS and post office services. The panel said it wants to see more innovation of this kind.

It has proposed creating a national network of Community Support Advisers to help churches identify and strengthen wide ranging relationships within their local area. It hopes that through greater community engagement, churches will be used more frequently and can maximise new funding options reflecting this broad community involvement.

Congregations are individually responsible for the care of their own

buildings and despite the commitment and hard work of volunteers, the panel found a lack of consistency in the ability of many churches to carry out routine maintenance and repairs.

The panel has recommended creating a group of 'Fabric Support Officers' who have practical heritage buildings expertise to ensure that all churches have access to high quality advice. It also wants churches to develop annual minor repairs plans. This will mean that repairs can be addressed immediately and prevent the development of more costly major repairs. In addition, it has recommended a rolling ten-year major repairs plan to be prepared and kept up to date so that larger works can be planned and given the best chance of being properly funded.

It has proposed that these recommendations should be tested through pilot schemes in both rural and urban areas.

ENDS

1. Read [Bernard Taylor's blog](#) about the review
 2. [The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#) was established in May, 2016.
 3. A call for evidence to inform the review received almost 5,800 responses.
 4. The panel consists of:
 - Chairman: Bernard Taylor CBE, Chairman of The Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851
 - Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council
 - Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust
 - Loyd Grossman, Chair of Heritage Alliance
 - Rt Revd Dr John Inge, Bishop of Worcester, Lead Bishop on Church Buildings
 - Sir Simon Jenkins, Trustee Churches Conservation Trust
 - Sir Peter Luff, Heritage Lottery Fund
 - Sir Laurie Magnus, Chairman Historic England
 - Neil Mendoza, Landmark Trust & DCMS Non-Executive Director
 - Very Revd Catherine Ogle, Dean of Winchester
 - Jennie Page, Vice Chair of the Church Buildings Council
 - Alice Perkins, former Chair of the Post Office
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News story: Sellafield leader awarded by the Duke

The Duke of Cambridge asked about Dorothy's work to decommission the legacy ponds

Dorothy Gradden, head of legacy ponds at the nuclear site, was presented with her medal in recognition of her services to the nuclear industry.

She attended Buckingham Palace with her son Josh and partner Paul Stewart, who also works at Sellafield Ltd.

Dorothy said:

It was an incredible day.

To walk through the Palace gates, under the Royal balcony and up through the steps into the ballroom, knowing who has walked up those steps before you was just mind boggling. I'll never forget it.

The Duke of Cambridge expressed an interest in Dorothy's work to decommission the legacy ponds, during a private conversation while presenting the award.

He said he'd never actually visited Sellafield but had skirted around its no-fly zone on several occasions while serving with the RAF.

When asked how she managed to do a job which involves moving legacy hazards on a daily basis, Dorothy replied "safely".

It was while in the cloakroom of Buckingham Palace that Dorothy found herself standing next to the author of the world's best-selling book series, Harry Potter.

Dorothy said:

I was adjusting my hat and there was JK Rowling in the mirror standing next to me adjusting hers. It brought home just how big a day this was.

Dorothy is in charge of decommissioning the two open air nuclear storage ponds at the Sellafield site, a programme that has taken huge strides forward under her watch.

She said:

I really do feel that this is what my career has been all about. I have the best job on site, technically challenging, leading a large culture change programme and delivering risk and hazard reduction every day. It really is a privilege to do this job.

A total of 60 people received their awards on the day, from the fields of education, business, theatre, music and the diplomatic service. After visiting the Palace in the morning, there was a treat of afternoon tea at the Savoy.

Press release: Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2018

The Queen has approved that His Grace Richard Walter John Montagu Douglas Scott, The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, KBE, DL, FSA, FRSE, be appointed as Her Majesty's Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2018.

The Lord High Commissioner is the Sovereign's personal representative to the Annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He attends the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on behalf of the Sovereign. He makes the opening and closing addresses to the Assembly, and carries out a number of official functions as the Lord High Commissioner.

Press release: Interim report: Collision near London Waterloo station

RAIB has today released its interim report following a collision near London Waterloo station, 15 August 2017.

We will publish a final report, including any safety recommendations, at the conclusion of our investigation.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry or by the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our

reports.

PDF, 1.3MB, 15 pages

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