

Press release: HMRC publishes Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17

The report shows that HMRC brought in an additional £29 billion by cracking down on the minority of individuals and businesses who try to not pay the tax they owe, while improving customer service for all taxpayers.

Jon Thompson, Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary, HMRC, said:

In the last year, we have generated £28.9 billion of compliance yield, billions of pounds that would have otherwise been lost to the UK through avoidance, evasion and organised crime but will now be spent on public services. That's around £1,000 for every household in the UK. We have also strengthened our grip on the minority who deliberately try to cheat the system and continue to pursue those who refuse to pay what they owe, on behalf of the honest majority. The message is clear to those who try to not pay their fair and legal share: there is nowhere left to hide.

Edward Troup, Executive Chair and Permanent Secretary, HMRC, said:

Our ability to collect the money required to fund the UK's public services is, of course, the ultimate yardstick by which we will be measured, but the public rightly judge us on the quality of service we provide to the overwhelming majority of people in the UK who are honest and pay the right amount of tax on time. Our continued focus on giving our customers the service level they deserve is paying dividends. There are now quick and simple online tools to allow people to deal with their taxes or tax credits anywhere, anytime and the best phone service in years for those wanting to call us.

In the last financial year HMRC surpassed expectations and exceeded targets across the board, but investment in supporting the vast majority of honest taxpayers to pay their tax and access services, has paid particular dividends. New online services are making it easier for customers to get advice and support, such as completing their Self Assessment, and has led to record numbers going digital.

And for customers still wishing to contact HMRC on the phone, they can now do so seven days a week, getting through in just four minutes on average.

HMRC's focus on making sure the minority of people who try to get away with paying less than their fair and legal share has meant record additional revenues from avoidance, evasion and organised crime. And continued progress on developing increasingly sophisticated and world-leading techniques will further close this net, making it harder than ever to get away with tax

dodging.

The report shows that HMRC:

- is transforming tax and payments for customers with contact centre staff now available seven days a week and answering phone calls in less than four minutes in 2016/17
- is marking the seventh consecutive year of record total tax revenues, collecting a total of £574.9 billion – £38.1 billion more than last year
- generated record compliance yield of £28.9bn through our work to stop avoidance, evasion and organised crime; more than ever before
- has over the last six years brought more than 500 serious organised criminals to justice. Investigations and enforcement action against organised crime generated or protected £3.2 billion in compliance yield in 2016-17
- handled more than 1,200 cases heard in courts and tribunals – winning 83% and protecting £15 billion in tax revenues
- helped more than nine million individuals to access online services with more than five million businesses having access to their online account to file, pay and obtain help.

Press release: PM meeting with King Felipe VI: 13 July 2017

The Prime Minister welcomed King Felipe VI of Spain to Downing Street this afternoon, as part of the Spanish State Visit to the UK. She said that the UK was delighted to be hosting the visit, and to have this historic opportunity to celebrate our longstanding partnership and our shared values and interests.

The Prime Minister welcomed the King's warm speech in Parliament yesterday, in which he reiterated the friendship between our two countries, and she agreed that the UK and Spain enjoy an incredibly strong relationship.

They discussed the close links between our people, who live, work, study and holiday in each other's country. The Prime Minister welcomed the valuable contribution that the many Spaniards who have made Britain their home make daily to our economy and society. And she paid tribute to the heroism of Spanish banker Ignacio Echeverría who was killed in last month's appalling act of terror at London Bridge as he rushed to help someone who was being attacked.

Their talks also touched on a range of areas on which the UK and Spain work closely together to ensure the security and prosperity of our people, including trade and investment, defence, science and innovation, and on the world stage.

The Prime Minister highlighted the scale of Spanish investment in the UK as a sign of the depth of our commercial ties. They agreed on the importance of standing up for free trade, and also highlighted the significance of our close cooperation on security and counterterrorism.

On Brexit, the Prime Minister said that we will seek a new, deep and special partnership with the whole EU as we leave, and that we are committed to ensuring we strengthen the bilateral ties between our two countries. She said we have made it a priority in the negotiations to guarantee the status of Spanish and other EU citizens living in the UK as part of a reciprocal deal that also provides the same certainty for UK citizens living in Spain and other EU countries.

They agreed that while our relationship may be rooted deeply in our past, it is just as important for our future as it has been in our history, and the friendship between our nations will continue to go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

Press release: Yorkshire Water fined £600,000 for polluting a Staithes watercourse with sewage sludge

Yorkshire Water has been fined £600,000 for polluting a Staithes watercourse with sewage that had leaked out from a poorly-maintained storage tank.

The company was sentenced on Thursday 13 July at Leeds Crown Court, after admitting one charge of causing a water discharge activity into Dales Beck, at Dalehouse, without an environmental permit.

The pollution originated from the firm's Hinderwell Waste Water Treatment Works in July 2015. It had leaked from a poorly-maintained, rusting sludge storage tank, which had holes in it.

Richard Bradley, prosecuting for the Environment Agency, told the court that the sewage had a significant impact on the quality of the water in the beck. The watercourse, which passes through a caravan park, was discoloured and had a foul odour. Up to 100 dead fish were seen, and water quality tests revealed high levels of ammonia and low dissolved oxygen levels.

Downstream, the pollution incident affected water quality in Staithes Harbour, which was a designated bathing water at the time. An 'abnormal situation' was declared for 17 days during the peak holiday season and Scarborough Council erected signs advising the public not to enter the water.

Yorkshire Water initially blamed works at the nearby Potash Mine for the

water discolouration, but four days after the spill they used dye testing to trace the source back to the treatment works.

Sewage sludge could clearly be seen in the yard near the tank, and from there it had entered Dales Beck via a small ditch below the Sewage Works. Yorkshire Water did not immediately clean up the yard because it believed the sludge was contained on the site and would be recirculated back into its treatment process. However, the firm's own site user manual stated that the site drainage is not sealed. This was not picked up by the company and the sewage was in fact discharging into the watercourse.

The court heard that, as well as causing the pollution, Yorkshire Water also failed to act quickly in cleaning it up. In August, the Environment Agency asked the firm to provide a plan for how it was going to clean up the mess, but no reply was received. After further visits and correspondence, the company was still cleaning sewage sludge from the water on 19 October, some three months after the incident.

In sentencing, His Honour Judge Khokhar said the company had been reckless, rather than just negligent.

Claire Campbell, environmental planning specialist at the Environment Agency, said after the hearing:

This case demonstrates how important it is that water companies and wider industries maintain their equipment and facilities to a high standard in order to protect the environment. This pollution incident had a significant impact on the ecology of the watercourse, as well as an impact on the amenity of a caravan park and Staithes beach.

In mitigation, Yorkshire Water told the court that it had invested in measures to prevent the incident recurring. A gully guard had been installed to contain any future spillages within the site, and an alarm had been installed on the sludge tank. The tank has now been replaced.

The company was also ordered to pay £28,078.10 in legal costs.

Press release: Defence Minister opens £3M Cyber Security Centre in Gloucester

The new 'Cyber Works' centre, is designed to tackle the complex cyber threats

the UK faces. It will create 90 high tech jobs in Gloucester and enable Lockheed Martin to work closely with its UK partners to share knowledge, research and deliver cutting edge capabilities.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

With our £1.9 billion National Cyber Security Strategy, Britain is a world leader in the field and the opening of today's cutting-edge centre is a great example of how partnerships with industry are at the heart of that strategy. Together we are developing solutions to national security risks.

We are already leading in NATO with support to offensive and defensive operations in the fight against Daesh and complex cyber threats, and I'm also delighted that this centre will further boost the UK's cyber capabilities.

The Government is investing £1.9 billion in cyber security as part of its five-year National Cyber Security Strategy to create a UK which is secure and resilient to cyber threats and prosperous and confident in the digital world.

A key part of that strategy is partnerships with industry, with £10 million being invested in a new Cyber Innovation Fund to give start-ups the boost and partners they need, while the £6.5 million CyberInvest Scheme is building a community of industry, government, and academics to support cutting-edge research and build UK security in cyber space.

The 'Cyber Works' centre will support Lockheed Martin's contribution to CyberInvest, while the company has also signed up to the Government's CyberFirst scheme which will boost UK skills by inspiring and supporting young people considering roles in cyber security and intelligence.

With National Offensive Cyber Planning allowing the UK to integrate cyber into all of its military operations, defence plays a key role in the UK's cyber security strategy. Offensive cyber is being routinely used in the war against Daesh, not only in Iraq but also in the campaign to liberate Raqqa and other towns on the Euphrates.

In Defence, the £800 million Innovation Initiative has already boosted investment in UK research and business, with multi-million pound competitions to develop artificial intelligence and automated systems.

In January, the MOD will open a dedicated state-of-the-art Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham, bringing together all our military joint cyber training into one place. And the Defence Secretary recently announced a major reorganisation of the Army's Royal Signals Corp and Intelligence Corp to equip them to fight the information battles of the 21st Century.

The MOD also has a key role to play in contributing to a culture of resilience. That's why we set up the Defence Cyber Partnership Programme (DCPP) to ensure that its industrial partners protect themselves and meet

robust cyber security standards.

Press release: University rapist is locked up for longer

Ibrahim Elamin, 35, who carried out a series of rapes against university students on their way home, will now spend longer in prison following a referral from the Solicitor General under the unduly lenient sentencing scheme.

Elamin originally received a 7 year and 8 months' prison sentence for rape and two other sexual offences when he appeared at Leicester Crown Court in May.

Over a period of six weeks in 2010, Elamin committed three similar offences against young males on a university campus. He lay in wait to attack students at Loughborough University who were on their way home from the Students' Union. Two of the victims were alone, with another being lured away from his friends before being sexually assaulted.

Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, argued that the original sentence given to Elamin was unduly lenient. The Court of Appeal has today increased his sentence to 11 years and 3 months.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

"These were premeditated attacks, preying on young men on their way home. Young people should be able to enjoy a night out and walk home without fear.

"I felt the original sentence did not accurately reflect the seriousness of this offending and I am pleased that the Court of Appeal agreed with me."