

[Press release: Tree-mendous photographs help save our oaks](#)

'Oak Sunrise' by professional photographer Alan Price has won a prize in the [International Garden Photographer of the Year \(IGPOTY\)](#) competition, run in partnership with [Action Oak](#).

[Action Oak](#) is a major campaign to protect the UK's oak trees from threats including pests and diseases. It is a unique collaboration of partners including charities, government, landowners and research institutions, dedicated to protecting oak trees for future generations.

The partnership has made good progress since its launch in May with priority areas for funding including research into the genetics of oak trees, the effects of climate change, drought on oaks, and pests and diseases.

The winning image, which has been unveiled during [The Tree Council's National Tree Week](#), captures beautifully why oak trees are such an iconic species and why we must do all we can to protect them.

Alan Price, winner of the Celebrating our Oaks' photography category said:

It was a misty winter morning when the first light of the sun illuminated the landscape, highlighting the bare and intricate form of this specimen oak tree.

Defra Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

I am delighted to announce the outcome of the very special 'Celebrating our Oaks' photography category and I would like to extend my congratulations to our worthy winner Alan Price for 'Oak Sunrise', a truly captivating image.

All the pictures submitted serve as wonderful reminders about why Action Oak was established in the first place; to protect our country's most iconic trees for future generations to be inspired by and enjoy.

A hardback book, titled 'Celebrating Our Oaks' and foreworded by Dame Judi Dench, has also been launched today and is [available to buy on the Woodland Trust website](#) or in Kew Garden shops. It features all of the winners of the photography competition plus exclusive contributions from celebrities including Joanna Lumley, Jon Snow and Alan Titchmarsh.

The proceeds from the sale of the book will be directed towards funding research and monitoring, via Action Oak, to help protect our oaks and ensure

their place in the UK landscape for future generations.

A touring exhibition of a selection of photographs from the competition, plus a number taken by a range of celebrities, will be launched at Wakehurst Place in late January. The exhibition will then tour around the UK to locations including the Yorkshire Arboretum, Westonbirt Arboretum, and Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, throughout 2019. Please see the [Action Oak website](#) for dates and locations.

Curtis McGlinchey, Manager of International Garden Photographer of the Year said:

Alan's image epitomises the objective of the award and manages to depict both the majesty and vulnerability of the oak. Through use of sepia tones, mist, bright morning sun and a focus on one highlighted subject he successfully captures the juxtaposition of ancient natural strength and the fight for survival that UK oaks must now endure.

Head of Trees and Woodland Conservation at the National Trust, Ray Hawes said:

As an Action Oak partner, the National Trust is very pleased to support "Celebrating our Oaks" which will help raise the awareness of the importance of these much valued trees and the vital work of the partnership in ensuring their future.

[News story: Graduate earnings remain high](#)

The vast majority of graduates with a degree are earning more at the age of 29 than those who do not go to university, it has been revealed today (27 November), following one of the biggest studies of its kind. The study shows that there continues to be a graduate premium, even as the number of students in higher education has grown.

The 'Absolute Returns' report, conducted independently by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, looks at earnings data up to the age of 29. The new data shows that female and male graduates are earning 28% and 8% more on average than their counterparts who opted for a different route of study after leaving school. As graduates' earnings rise more quickly during their early and mid-careers, particularly for men, it is expected that returns will increase further once looked at over a lifetime.

The research, which will help policy makers, regulators and students understand the different outcomes from different courses and universities, also shows that a number of institutions deliver negative financial outcomes for approximately 4% of male and 0.4% of female students. That is to say, graduates from these institutions earn less than the average person with similar A Level grades who did not go to university at all.

There are several possible reasons for this:

- Students choosing to study courses that have a high social value when in employment, but not necessarily high wages
- Students opting to study subjects such as creative arts, drama and music with low proportions of people going on to earn high salaries.
- Students attending a university in a part of the country where wages are below the national average, who then stay in that area, adding to its economy, but not necessarily earning as much as they could elsewhere.

But there are still cases where students aren't necessarily choosing the institution that will deliver the best returns for their course. The study shows how for some studying the same subject at a different institution – or indeed continuing their education at an alternative to university – could significantly increase their future earnings and career prospects.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

I want to see our universities competing on the quality of what they offer, value for money and strong positive outcomes for their students so that every degree is worth the investment.

This landmark research proves that the graduate earnings premium remains robust, even as we have made higher education available to more young people than ever before. Higher education is delivering for students, the taxpayer and the economy, and will continue to do so as long as we focus relentlessly on quality.

The Office for Students, the new regulator we have set up to look out for students' interests, has the power to crack down on institutions delivering poor outcomes for students. I strongly support their work, and expect to see them use the full range of powers at their disposal to protect students' interests.

The graduate earnings premium could be even higher if all prospective students have the best information possible about where and what they study when making choices. The research we're publishing today, alongside other data like the Teaching Excellence Framework and our Open Data prize, will help make this a reality.

Many of the universities whose graduates enjoy high earnings premiums have strong links to employers and have built in work experience to help develop the skills that graduates need.

This must be built on even further. Our plans to expand Accelerated

Degrees will boost the opportunities all prospective students have to access high-quality courses.

Value for money is recognised by the government as a crucial part of an investment in a degree, and that is why it is one of the key areas being looked at in the Post-18 Review of education and funding.

Financial outcomes are of course just one of the considerations that students have when choosing a university. The benefits of higher education are not limited to increasing a graduate's salary. For example, many people will wish to pursue public service, third sector careers or the arts which have a very high social value, but which aren't necessarily amongst the most highly paid. And the experience of higher education in itself can be valuable: in its exposure to new ideas, instilling a lifelong love of learning and the many social and health benefits graduates enjoy.

The Office for Students (OfS), the new regulator of Higher Education institutions, has a remit to drive quality and value for money for students. It has a range of levers to crack down on poor performance. Institutions breaching their registration conditions, may, in the most serious of instances, be deregistered.

The OfS is already using its powers to tackle institutions with poor student outcomes data, imposing additional registration conditions on university including [London Metropolitan University](#) and [Bolton University](#) in response to specific concerns.

Concerns were raised with Bolton over employment outcomes for PGCE students, while London Metropolitan were criticised over professional employment for undergraduates, and postgraduate progression. Both are now required to construct an improvement plan around their continuation and completion rates.

The publication of the IFS's research today is part of a government drive to shed light on student outcomes. It builds on the commitment to provide more and better information to prospective students, including historical earnings, employability, and teaching quality at universities.

The research published by the IFS is the second in the series of such publications exploring the value for money students receive from degrees. It follows the [first publication released](#) in June 2018, which compared university courses directly and revealed that studying the same subject at a different institution can significantly affect future earnings and career prospects.

This ground-breaking project arises from a 2016 HE White Paper commitment to better understand the benefits of higher education and how this varies by course in order to improve student information.

Press release: PM promises deal to strengthen the Union

Prime Minister Theresa May will visit Wales and Northern Ireland this week, to set out how the deal agreed with the EU delivers for every corner of the United Kingdom.

In Wales today (Tuesday 27th November), she will tour the Royal Welsh Winter Fair, speak to farmers and producers and view their prize-winning livestock and produce. Profitable Welsh exports including Welsh lamb and Caerphilly cheese will be protected under the Withdrawal Agreement.

She will then meet with Welsh political leaders, and reiterate how hard she has fought throughout negotiations to ensure that taking back control of our own laws is at the heart of our Brexit deal.

Responsibility for more than 150 areas of policy will pass to the devolved parliaments, meaning they will be taking more of the decisions that impact people's lives in areas from agriculture and fisheries, to air quality and organ donation.

In Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister will attend a community event at Queen's University Belfast, for roundtable discussions with groups from across society including students, academics and community and religious leaders.

This will be followed by meetings with all five political parties in Belfast, where she will urge politicians to listen to major employers and trade associations in Northern Ireland and get behind the deal.

Over the past week, Manufacturing NI and the Ulster Farmers' Union have expressed their support for the deal and publicly warned about the potential consequences of no deal for Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister will also set out how the maintenance of the Common Travel Area and the agreement reached on the backstop honours the Belfast Agreement and ensures there can be no return to the borders of the past.

Throughout these discussions, she will emphasise that strengthening the union has been her priority from the very start of negotiations, and make the case for her deal.

The Prime Minister said:

Having been told by the EU that we would need to split the UK in two, we are leaving as one United Kingdom. My deal delivers for every corner of the UK and I will work hard to strengthen the bonds that unite us as we look ahead to our future outside of the EU.

Throughout negotiations, I have fought to ensure that powers returning from the EU will be restored to the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

This deal delivers for farmers in Wales, who deserve better than the Common Agricultural Policy. After we leave the CAP, we will be free to design a new policy that works for agricultural producers in all four nations and we are taking that work forward.

This deal avoids a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. This has been at the forefront of my mind throughout the negotiations. It has been especially clear to me when I have visited communities along the border in Northern Ireland and seen first-hand how important it is that the unique circumstances local employers face are recognised in any agreement.

They need to be able to trade freely across the border with Ireland and have unfettered access to the rest of the United Kingdom's market. This deal makes that possible and that's why, across Northern Ireland, employers large and small have been getting behind it.

Press release: PM business briefing: 26 November 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister hosted Chairmen and CEOs from some of the UK's largest employers and investors this evening for a short presentation and question and answer session following the EU Council on Sunday.

Over 100 leaders representing a range of sectors including financial services, advanced manufacturing, food and drink and retail attended, alongside business organisations and trade associations.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, Stephen Barclay, opened the session and this was followed by a technical briefing from senior officials. The Business Secretary and the Chancellor were also in attendance.

The Prime Minister then gave a short address, she said:

I am acutely aware that for employers like you this is about realities on the ground and the practicalities of doing business. That is why, since I became Prime Minister, I have been clear in my desire to secure a Brexit that honours the result of the referendum

in a way that protects jobs and economic growth.

The Withdrawal Agreement endorsed by leaders in Brussels yesterday does many things. It ensures our smooth and orderly departure on 29th March next year. It delivers a time-limited Implementation Period, during which trade will continue on current terms, so you have time to prepare for the new arrangements and only face one set of changes. It protects the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living in the EU, meaning no disruption to your existing workforces and it meets our commitment to ensure there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland – and no customs border in the Irish Sea. Having spoken to many of you over the past two years I know just how important it is that you continue to enjoy frictionless trade with the rest of the EU.

On the Political Declaration she said:

It includes a new Free Trade Area with no tariffs, fees, quantitative restrictions or rules of origin checks – an unprecedented economic relationship that no other major economy has. It includes liberalisation in trade in services well beyond WTO commitments and building on recent EU Free Trade Agreements. It includes new arrangements for our financial services sector – ensuring market access cannot be withdrawn on a whim. And regulatory autonomy will be preserved, but we will each ensure that our approaches are transparent, efficient and compatible as far as possible, doing all we can to avoid unnecessary regulatory requirements.

So taken together, the Withdrawal Agreement and the broad terms of our new relationship, should provide your businesses with the reassurance and certainty that I know is so important to you.

Representatives from businesses including BT, Shell and Blackrock and trade associations including the National Farmers Union and London First asked questions.

[Press release: Marsquakes' mission](#)

successfully lands on Red Planet

The NASA InSight mission landed at 19:53 GMT on Monday, 26 November.

InSight will study the inside of Mars to learn how planets, moons and meteorites with rocky surfaces, including the Earth and its Moon, formed. The lander's instruments include a [seismometer](#) to detect 'Marsquakes' and a [probe](#) to monitor the flow of heat beneath the surface of the planet.

Artist's impression of InSight on Mars. Credit: NASA/JPL-CALTECH.

The UK Space Agency has invested £4 million in the short period Seismometer (SEIS-SP). This will be on the surface of Mars to measure seismic waves from Marsquakes. Scientists expect to detect anywhere between a dozen and a hundred of these tremors up to 6.0 on the Richter scale over the course of two years.

Sue Horne, Head of Space Exploration at the UK Space Agency, said:

It is wonderful news that the InSight spacecraft has landed safely on Mars. The UK scientists and engineers involved in this mission have committed several years of their lives to building the seismometer on board, and the descent is always a worrying time. We can now look forward to the deployment of the instrument and the data that will start to arrive in the new year, to improve our understanding of how the planet formed.

InSight carries three instruments designed and built in the UK as part of the seismic package. These microseismometer sensors were developed by Imperial College London and integrated with electronics built by the University of Oxford.

The UK team is led by Professor Tom Pike at Imperial, who designed the sensors to withstand the shock and vibration of the launch from Earth and landing on Mars. The sensors can detect motion at sub-atomic scales with the help of the electronics built at Oxford under Dr Simon Calcutt, with support from STFC RAL Space.

Prof Tom Pike said:

We were able to turn on the microseismometers during the cruise to Mars and they performed perfectly, showing they survived the rigours of launch as they left Earth. But every landing on Mars is risky and we were waiting nervously at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to get the first signal back from the successful landing.

The lander will take several weeks to deploy two of its three instruments, the seismometer and probe on to the Martian surface. The UK will have a team of instrument scientists from Imperial and Oxford at JPL in California to help with this process, including selecting just the right spot for the robot arm to deposit the seismometer.

Prof Pike added:

We should be listening for Marsquakes for at least two years, and we hope considerably longer. It is critical that we set down the instrument in the best place to ensure we're stable, and then follow up with adding a cover to shield our sensors from the wind.

The instrument team will be joined by UK seismologists from Bristol, led by Dr Nick Teanby, Imperial, led by Professor Gareth Collins, and Oxford led by Dr Neil Bowles, to analyse the data from all of the mission's instruments.

Dr Neil Bowles, from the University of Oxford's Department of Physics, said:

The InSight SEIS-SP seismometer is one of the most sensitive and challenging instruments we have worked on for spaceflight in Oxford. After launch in May and successful instrument checks during the cruise to Mars, the team are absolutely delighted to witness the landing. We've shown that a traditionally delicate scientific instrument is capable of being launched on a rocket and the next challenge is to see how it behaves on the surface of the planet.

With our partners at Imperial College London, STFC RAL Space and the UK Space Agency, getting the SEIS-SP seismometer assembled and qualified for flight has been a significant effort. After nearly a decade of preparation, building and testing we are incredibly excited that the science can now start.

The mission, which took off from California in May this year, will conduct six science investigations on and below the surface of Mars to uncover the evolutionary history that shaped all of the rocky planets in the inner solar system.

Anna Horleston, a researcher at Bristol University, said:

I've studied seismic data from all over the world but to get the chance to study data from Mars is just something else. To finally see it arrive and to get to test out our techniques on real Martian seismic data is so exciting.

The UK instrument will work together with seismometers from France, as well as major contributions from Switzerland, Germany and the US. Other

instruments on board include RISE, a precision radio tracking of the lander that can determine the direction and motion of the rotation of Mars and the HP3 (Heat Flow and Physical Properties Probe) which will study heat flow by embedding a temperature sensor under the surface of Mars.