

News story: Class of 2018 celebrated across the country

At events held in London, Brighton, Weston-Super-Mare, Leeds and Cambridge apprentices from across a number of sectors and job roles were recognised for successfully completing their apprenticeship in the last 12 months.

The 'class of 2018' graduation ceremonies were held as part of the 'Apprenticeships Work' themed week bringing employers and apprentices from across England together to celebrate the success of apprenticeships, whilst encouraging even more people to choose apprenticeships as a pathway to a great career.

Sue Husband, director, National Apprenticeship Service added:

Apprenticeships hold the same prestige as university and events like these graduation ceremonies taking place across England today have given apprentice graduates the recognition they deserve for completing their apprenticeship.

Whether apprentices are moving onto the next level of their apprenticeship or if they are now in full time positions with their employer, they have shown that apprenticeships truly do work to get individuals onto their chosen career path and on the road to success.

As an apprentice myself I know the hard work that goes in to completing an apprenticeship. I take my hat off to the class of 2018 and thank them and their employers for supporting apprenticeships and the benefits they bring to individuals, employers, local communities and the wider economy.

Apprentices at today's graduation ceremonies come from wide ranging sectors, representing dedicated apprentice employers, including BT, Lloyds Bank, Troup, Bywaters + Anders, HMRC, the Royal Navy, Channel 4, the NHS, MOD and Halifax – amongst others.

Graduating Charlotte Brandom, IT Support Engineer and former BT Higher Apprentice said:

"I am so pleased that I did my apprenticeship. I had started off on the university route, studying Psychology, but I realised it wasn't working for me and switched paths to do an IT and Networks apprenticeship with BT. I have been able to rotate roles, so have experience from several parts of the business. I now work in a job I really enjoy – technical support for cloud services – and it's all thanks to the skills my apprenticeship gave me."

Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Networks from across England supported the

National Apprenticeship Service in encouraging apprentices to attend a ceremony today.

Charlotte Hughes, Chair of the Young Apprenticeships Ambassador Network in the East of England added:

The apprentice graduation ceremonies have created quite a buzz amongst the apprentice community and it's great that they are happening during National Apprenticeship Week.

Graduation ceremonies are an amazing opportunity to celebrate all the apprentices and their achievements. It's also a great time to talk to those graduating to build a greater network of apprentice ambassadors in England. I hope that everyone attending the events enjoys their moment in the limelight – it's well deserved.

You can find images from the 'class of 2018' event on the [National Apprenticeships Service Flickr page](#).

[News story: New Payment Plans for Licence Fee to be trialled](#)

Customers on the new plan will still pay the same amount of licence fee (£150.50 per year) as everyone else, however instead of paying the cost of the licence fee in full at the start customers will be able to pay-as-you-go each month with the cost split evenly over the course of the year. Currently weekly and monthly payment plans require higher initial payments over the first six months to protect against a risk of non-payment.

This more flexible payment plan will help manage the cost of living for those who might struggle to pay the licence fee, and was one of the key recommendations from the 2015 independent review on TV licence fee enforcement carried out by David Perry QC. He recommended that the government should make available simple and flexible payment plans for those facing difficulty in paying the licence fee, and the government is committed to delivering this.

DCMS Secretary of State, Matt Hancock said:

The licence fee enables the BBC to produce fantastic programmes that we want everyone to enjoy and be entertained and informed by. But we know that sometimes households may struggle to pay the licence fee, which is why we've worked with the BBC to develop a simpler and more flexible payment plan to help those on low

incomes.

It is expected that simplifying the payment plans will have the added benefit of reducing the amount of prosecutions for licence fee evasion. There were 159,637 convictions for evasion in 2016 and currently the BBC estimate that 6-7% households evade the fee.

The six month sign up period for the new plan, will run from 1 April 2018 to the end of September 2018. The trial plan will only be available to certain groups of customers:

- people who have sought debt advice from certain charities
- those who have previously held a licence which was recently cancelled because of missed payments
- people who have been questioned under caution for TV licence fee evasion

Eligible customers will be invited to join the scheme through via three different recruitment methods:

- Referral through specified debt reduction charities
- Via a letter from TV Licensing
- During a visit from a TV Licensing enquiry officer

Pipa Doubtfire, Head of Revenue Management at the BBC said:

The BBC has worked with DCMS on the best way to implement David Perry Q.C.'s recommendation and we welcome government legislation enabling us to run the Simple Payment Plan trial, which has been designed to help those most in need.

Jane Tully, director of external affairs at the Money Advice Trust, the charity that runs National Debtline, said:

The increased flexibility to pay for a TV licence that the Simple Payment Plan provides is an important step forward in improving support for people in financial difficulty in this area. Five percent of the people we help at National Debtline have a TV licence debt. We look forward to working with TV Licensing on this trial and to see how it helps those people we hear from who are struggling to pay the licence fee.

Dawn Stobart, Director of External Affairs for debt counselling charity Christians Against Poverty said:

For those on a very low income, the cost of a new TV licence can be very difficult to meet so this new arrangement looks set to be a great help.

Customers joining the scheme will be compared with other customer groups to see how well they keep up with the payments and if they renew their licence. This assessment period will conclude in September 2019 after which the BBC will evaluate whether the trial has been successful.

[Speech: FCO Minister Mark Field's speech at the International Business and Diplomatic Exchange Conference](#)

Thank you Sir Roger. I should like to thank all at IBDE for this chance to speak to you today, about the challenges and opportunities for trade after we have left the European Union.

If I may invoke the great British art of the understatement, I would confess that this is an area of some fertile debate – including no doubt by some of you in this room. I am not here to try to change your mind about Brexit, but I should like to share with you some of my experience as Minister for Asia and the Pacific which has informed my perspective, which is that we have to be positive and optimistic to make a success of Brexit, as we forge new and deeper relationships around the world.

In any circumstances, when forming a view about the future, everyone puts their own experiences, interests, and perceptions into the mix.

For my part, as the son of a German mother who was a refugee twice by the age of 15 in the aftermath of World War Two; as a former businessman; and as MP for Westminster and the City of London; when it came to deciding how to vote in the EU referendum, I was firmly committed to remain, primarily for emotional and geopolitical reasons.

By contrast the economic case always seemed to me to be more evenly balanced. That remains my position today.

What has become increasingly clear to me as I have travelled more frequently since being appointed Minister for Asia, is the scope and diversity of the opportunities that Brexit presents around the world.

Now, as I say, I appreciate that the scale of that opportunity has been, and remains, hotly contested.

Another of your speakers today, Sir Martin Donnelly, vividly compared it to being satisfied by the prospect of a packet of crisps, rather than the three course meal our current trade with the EU amounts to, apparently.

Sir Martin has had a distinguished career of public service in a variety of

Government departments. But whilst avoiding the temptation of snacks at the expense of dinner is sound nutritional advice, it does, I feel, rather unfairly misrepresent what this Government is working hard to achieve.

The reality is that we are working to maintain the full nourishment that trading with the wider world has to offer, whilst at the same time, continuing to enjoy the best gastronomic delights of enthusiastic engagement with the EU. I shall not even begin to contemplate how the eating, or otherwise, of cake fits with this menu!

I believe the detailed blueprint for trading with the European Union that the Prime Minister set out last week demonstrates that our aim is achievable.

Whilst the world will continue to debate the risks and opportunities around Brexit, one strand of our post-Brexit economic vision that seems irrefutable is that the economies that will grow fastest in the decades ahead are not the ones nearest to our shores.

As you weigh up the economic risks and opportunities, I encourage everyone to form their view of Brexit fully sighted of the context of the changing economic, demographic, and political world around us.

57% of Britain's exports are now sold beyond the EU, up from 46% in 2006. So non-EU exports have already grown to become the lion's share; and what is even more interesting for our economy, is that these non-EU exports are evenly made up of goods and services, while our exports to the European Union are still dominated by goods.

The IMF estimates that in the next decade or so, 90% of global economic growth will come from outside the European Union.

So it is hard to argue that we are not witnessing a shift of economic power; and that it is already shaping British exports and the British economy. Indeed, as Minister for Asia and the Pacific I would go further and say categorically that we are seeing a shift eastwards.

I believe our ability to prosper with and alongside these most dynamic economies is of fundamental importance to this country – not just to our economy, but, by extension, politically and socially too. Tilt to Asia As I say, many of the most dynamic economies are on my patch. They offer unparalleled potential for British business, traders and investors, and given my role I make no excuse for focusing on them today.

The raw statistics are beyond dispute. As the 1960s dawned, Asia's share of global GDP was less than 20%. Last year it reached almost twice that, and over the next 30 years Asia is predicted to generate more than half the world's economic output.

China and India are rapidly joining the ranks of advanced economies. By 2020 China's middle class is expected to number 600 million.

By 2030, China will have more than 220 cities with a population greater than 1 million people. The whole of Europe will have just 35.

Meanwhile, India is the fastest growing major economy, with growth estimated at over 7% in the last quarter of 2017. It is already the world's third largest economy measured by purchasing power parity and, on current trends, by 2030 it is on course to become the world's third largest economy – full stop.

And it's not just China and India that are growing. The collective growth of the ASEAN countries has averaged 5% in each and every year of the past decade. By 2030, ASEAN is predicted to be the world's 4th largest market – it is already collectively our third largest inward investor, after the EU and the US. It is also predicted that there will be 1.1 billion middle class Africans by 2060.

What does it tell us about future customers for our goods and services? In human terms it means that tens of millions of people are being lifted out of poverty, with a similarly huge rise in the number of people with money to spend. This rising tide of consumer demand is a huge opportunity.

And what does that mean for the UK? It's good news. There is a natural fit between UK services expertise and demand by a fast-growing middle class in developing economies. And let me just say at this point that what I do not find on my working visits to Asia, is undue concern about Brexit.

My political counterparts do understand that the next couple of years will be uncertain. There may be bumps in the road.

But they tend to take a much longer view. The message I hear consistently is they have traded with the UK and built links with people in this country for decades – in some cases centuries.

They see this continuing, and indeed strengthening when we leave the European Union.

That loyalty reflects positively on British businesspeople as trusted partners; on this country as a safe haven to do business; and on the vast array of sought-after goods and services we have to offer.

I have seen this on my recent visits – to Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea and India – where there has been real interest in our traditional areas of economic strength; and equally strong interest in our most cutting edge sectors.

From our world leading universities to leading the world in financial services.

From our prestige brands to delivering prestige projects.

If your experience abroad has been anything like mine, you will know that British innovation, and expertise, whether in pharmaceuticals, biotech, human sciences or financial technology is deeply valued.

In our distilleries and on our factory floors; in our tech hubs and our research facilities: ideas, goods, and services are being produced that are

coveted right across the globe.

I shall briefly touch on just two. One old and one new.

Naturally, not least as MP for the City, I am passionate about maintaining our global pre-eminence in financial and professional services.

As you know, our strength in financial services – and the income-generating fee pool that it supports – in law, in insurance, in management consultancy and much more besides – extends way beyond London, and out into the regions.

Every part of his country has something to gain from a Global Britain exporting more financial services to the most dynamic economies in the world.

That is why I spend a huge chunk of my time – whether here in London or abroad – championing the UK's global services industry.

Another area of British expertise I find my counterparts wanting to hear about is in financial technology cyber security.

Every government knows their increasing dependence on technology in their administrative systems and their economies means they are increasingly vulnerable to cyber-attack.

This is a huge opportunity for us. We are recognised world leaders in cyber security capacity building.

We have experience, know how, and technology to sell. Which is why our cyber security sector is forecast to be worth £2.5 billion by 2021.

So you know, as well as I, that we have world class goods and services to offer. So what, you might ask, is the UK Government doing to help British business thrive abroad?

The Prime Minister created new departments after the referendum. This was to ensure that we would have the resources and bandwidth to deliver the best possible departure from the EU;

- the best possible future trading relationship with the EU;
- the best possible ongoing relationships with European countries;
- and the best possible basis on which to trade right around the world after Brexit.

This intensification of resources has heralded an unprecedented period of economic diplomacy – opening more doors and breaking down more barriers for British businesses.

For example, we have opened 14 informal trade dialogues with 21 countries –

from the United States to the United Arab Emirates.

These are laying the groundwork for future Free Trade Agreements, and looking for quick wins that can boost the trade relationship now earlier.

We have established the Prosperity Fund, which is using a significant chunk of our development budget to stimulate economic growth in middle income countries; and in doing so, opening up economic opportunities for UK business.

And we have appointed new Trade Commissioners to ensure the UK makes the most of each and every market.

To conclude, whilst we should of course continue to take advantage of the scale and importance of our closest established markets within the EU, we should also be in no doubt that the fastest growing and most dynamic markets of the future lie outside it.

This country's future economic success will be built not only on continuing to trade with Europe, but also on strengthening our trading ties to the wider world. That is what this government is working tirelessly to achieve.

We have set out a positive vision of an optimistic open, outward looking, free trading, buccaneering Global Britain.

It is a vision of a country back in charge of its trading destiny. A country with the agility to make the most of the trade opportunities on its doorstep, and with the flexibility to make much more of all those growing opportunities further afield.

To realise that vision we know that Government and businesses need to work hand in hand. We in Government will continue to set the framework and develop the international relationships – opening doors and taking down barriers. But it is ultimately our enterprising businesspeople who will make the most of those new opportunities and thereby determine the trading future of this country.

I want you to know that I, and this government, will be backing British business all the way – doing all we can to help you realise our vision of a prosperous, truly Global Britain.

Press release: Work starts on multi-million pound North East flood scheme

(L-R) Simon Wilson, Environment Agency, Coun. Moira Smith, South Tyneside Council, and Liz Walters, Tyne Rivers Trust.

Work has started on site on a £2.5million project which will help protect around 100 homes and businesses in a South Tyneside community from flooding.

Monkton flood alleviation scheme will also see a section of the Bede Burn running underground opened up – known as ‘daylighting’ – and green space created for the community to enjoy.

The scheme is being delivered by South Tyneside Council and its partners at the Environment Agency and Tyne Rivers Trust. It’s expected to be completed in the winter.

It will tackle surface water flooding, which happens when rainwater does not drain away or soak into the ground, but lies or flows over the ground instead.

Communities better protected

Councillor Moira Smith, Lead Member for Area Management and Community Safety at South Tyneside Council, said:

We are delighted to see work get underway to reduce the risk of flooding to properties which have been badly affected in the past.

It is never possible to guarantee that an area will be flood free. However by working with our partners we can certainly help to increase the level of protection and reassurance by delivering long-term sustainable schemes such as this.

These measures will go a long way to controlling the flow of surface water and diverting it away from local residents and businesses. Once complete, communities will be better protected with the added benefit of an enhanced local environment.

Wider social and environmental benefits

The scheme involves managing surface water where problems have been identified around the Monkton Burn, Lukes Lane Estate and Leam Lane area, Mill Lane, Lilac Walk/College Road, Devon Road, Campbell Park Road/ Thirlmere Court and Mountbatten Avenue areas.

The plan includes improved drainage and landscaping next to Toner Avenue School and as part of uncovering the Bede Burn an attenuation basin to store run-off water during storms will be created.

The scheme will have wider social and environmental benefit, encouraging local people and children involved in creating valuable new habitat.

The scheme is largely funded by the Environment Agency, as well as a contribution from the local levy – which is money raised by local authorities for flood projects.

Leila Huntington, Flood Risk Manager for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

This is an excellent example of partners working together to not only develop a scheme which reduces the risk of surface water flooding but also creates valuable habitat and a space for the community to enjoy.

We've been working with the council and Tyne Rivers Trust to raise awareness of the importance of understanding flood risk and taking care of their environment and there'll be opportunities for the community to get involved. This is something they really can be proud of.

Liz Walters, Project Manager at Tyne Rivers Trust added:

This is a great example of using environmentally friendly ways to reduce the risk of flooding. As part of the project we'll be working with the local community and schools to create a green space for local residents to enjoy as well as creating new habitats for wildlife.

Anyone who'd like to volunteer to help with planting at Bede Burn should get in touch with Tyne Rivers Trust on 01434 636904.

The latest information on the scheme can be found at the [Monkton Flood Alleviation Scheme website](#)

[News story: Foreign Office Minister for Europe and the Americas visits Chile](#)

Minister Duncan arrives in Santiago de Chile today (9th March) to attend the inauguration of the new President of Chile, Mr Sebastian Piñera and discuss the future of UK-Chile bilateral relations with the incoming administration.

As well as meetings with Interior Minister Andres Chadwick and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roberto Ampuero, Sir Alan will meet Chilean business leaders to discuss future commercial opportunities under the Global Britain agenda, host an event for Chilean alumni of the UK's Chevening Scholarship and International Leaders programmes, and deliver a foreign policy lecture to students at the prestigious Universidad del Desarrollo.

Sir Alan Duncan said:

My first official visit to Chile comes at an important time, as our two countries continue to work closely on regional and international issues such as human rights, security and peace keeping, climate change and protection of the oceans.

The UK and Chile have strong historical links that go back over 200 years. Our relationship will continue to go from strength to strength in the 21st century, as we further our collaboration in fields as diverse as trade and investment, science and innovation, and green sector growth.