

Press release: Employment remains at record high rate of 74.6%

Official figures released today (12 April 2017) show that the employment rate is at 74.6%, with 31.84 million people in work – an increase of 312,000 on the year and the joint highest rate since records began in 1971.

The Office for National Statistics has also announced that the unemployment rate remains low at 4.7%. It has not been lower since 1975.

Full-time work continues to be the driving force behind the rise in employment. Average weekly wages grew by 2.3% including bonuses over the last year. Wage growth has remained above 2% every month since the beginning of 2016.

Secretary of State Damian Green said:

This is yet another strong set of figures, with unemployment at a rate that hasn't been beaten since the 1970s and more vacancies than ever before.

More people are finding full-time jobs and average wages have grown yet again, meaning more families have the security of a regular wage.

However, there is always more to do. That's why we're creating a welfare system that rewards work through Universal Credit, which helps claimants keep more of the money they earn.

Today's figures also show:

- there are 1.56 million unemployed people, 141,000 fewer than this time last year
- the number of people in full-time employment grew by 146,000 in the last 3 months
- the unemployment rate of 16 to 24 year olds who have left full-time education is 10.9% – a decrease of 1.3% from last year
- long-term unemployment is at 389,000 – the lowest since 2008

Separate figures out today show [1.1 million claims have been made to Universal Credit](#). Of the 490,000 people now claiming Universal Credit, nearly 40% are in work.

Estimates of the Claimant Count are no longer included in the ONS statistical bulletin as they may now be providing a misleading representation of the UK labour market. ONS released a [statement explaining the decision about the claimant count](#) on 23 February 2017.

Media enquiries for this press release – 0203 267 5118

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News story: New Lower Thames Crossings to cut congestion and create thousands of jobs

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Preferred route for a new Lower Thames Crossing and A13 widening announced.

Press release: More than 130 new free schools to create more good places

Thousands of new school places will be created across the country following the largest wave of free schools approvals this Parliament, giving more parents the choice of a good school place for their child.

Today (12 April 2017) the Department for Education has approved applications for 131 new schools, creating more than 69,000 places. These schools will be led by high-performing institutions, including a grammar-school-led multi-academy trust (MAT) and the largest state boarding school in the country, demonstrating how existing high-performing schools can help raise attainment more widely, as set out in the government's education proposals.

Free schools are one of the highest performing groups of non-selective state schools, with 29% of those inspected rated outstanding by Ofsted. Since 2014, more than 80% of mainstream free schools have been approved in areas where there was a need for more school places, while others are opened in response to parental demand to create competition and drive up standards where existing provision is not adequate.

Today's approvals build on the government's strong record in creating more good school places. Already, there are 1.8 million more children in good or outstanding schools compared to 2010. The new approvals also demonstrate the government's determination to tap into the expertise that already exists within the school system to ensure standards continue to rise.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

We need schools that can bring out the best in every single child no matter where they're growing up, how much their parents earn, or however different their talents are.

That's why these new schools are so important – they give us the school places we need for the future, and they also give parents more choices to find a great school place in their area that's right for their child.

New free school proposals approved today include:

- Stone Lodge Academy – a new secondary school for 11- to 19-year-olds in Dartford, proposed by Endeavour Multi Academy Trust. The trust already runs 2 highly successful grammar schools and will use their expertise running selective schools to open a new non-selective free school
- Barton Court Academy Trust Free School – proposed by the Ofsted-outstanding Barton Court Grammar School, a new non-selective free school providing 1,050 school places for 11- to 19-year-olds in Canterbury
- The Flagship School – a parent-led special school to provide 56 places for 9- to 6-year-old pupils in Hastings, which was identified as an opportunity area earlier this year
- City Enterprise Academy – proposed by the successful City Learning Trust, the school will provide 100 much-needed alternative provision places in Stoke-on-Trent, which was identified as an opportunity area earlier this year
- Sapientia Primary Prep School – proposed by The Sapientia Education Trust, which runs Wymondham College – the largest state boarding school in England. The school for 5- to 11-year-olds will benefit from the expertise and facilities the trust has to offer, and provide 450 primary places in Norfolk
- School 21 Campus and School 21 Sugar House – 2 new schools for 5-to 16-year-olds in Newham, East London, creating over 2,400 places. The schools will be operated by the trust behind School 21, which has been rated outstanding by Ofsted
- Rushey Mead Free School – will provide 1,200 new secondary places in Leicester. It will be opened by the trust behind the Rushey Mead Academy – rated outstanding by Ofsted and consistently one of the highest performing schools in Leicester

124 free schools have opened since 2015, with a further 376 set to open by 2020 – including the schools announced today – which means the government is on track to meet its manifesto commitment of opening 500 more new free schools by September 2020.

As part of its work to open more free schools the government has created a new body – [LocatED](#). The organisation is made up of experienced property specialists to help speed up the process of acquiring sites for new schools and get the best value for the taxpayer.

Wave 12 free schools approved today:

1. 111 free schools in total creating 67,718 new school places:
 - 18 schools in the East of England, creating 8,875 places
 - 9 schools in the East Midlands, creating 8,105 places
 - 7 schools in Yorkshire and the Humber, creating 4,006 places
 - 2 schools in the North East, creating 204 places
 - 5 schools in the North West, creating 4,610 places
 - 27 schools in the South East, creating 15,429 places
 - 15 schools in the South West, creating 7,721 places
 - 12 schools in the West Midlands, creating 9,060 places
 - 16 schools in London, creating 9,708 places
 2. In addition, 20 local authority areas have been approved to create a new special school through the [free school process](#) – taking the total number of approvals to 131. This will create 1,700 school places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. These will be created in Bedford, Blackpool, Bradford, Bristol, Cheshire East, Croydon, Doncaster, Enfield, Essex, Hampshire, Havering, Herefordshire, Hounslow, Manchester, Portsmouth, Redbridge, Sheffield, South Gloucestershire, Suffolk and Sunderland.
 3. Free schools can be set up by parents, teachers, charities, businesses, cultural and sporting bodies, community groups, academy trusts and sponsors, and existing schools in response to demand from the local community, either where there is a shortage of places, or where the parents are not happy with the places on offer.
 4. 76% of open mainstream free schools up to September 2016 are located in areas where there was a need for more school places, and almost half are in the 30% most deprived communities in the country. They are also more likely to be rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted than other state schools – and can help to raise standards in neighbouring schools by introducing fresh ideas and competition.
 5. [LocatED](#) will be accountable to the Secretary of State for Education, and will be responsible for the acquisition of sites for new schools. It launched in March 2017 and will play a vital role in supporting the department to meet this government’s manifesto commitment to open 500 new schools by 2020, almost double the number of free schools opened over the course of the last Parliament.
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£1.5m investment to quadruple production capacity at Massilly UK's Swansea facility

The company currently produces 10m aerosol cans a year and the investment, supported by £200,000 from the Welsh Government, will upgrade its existing production line and introduce an additional line, enabling it to produce up to 40million cans a year by 2018.

The investment will secure the sustainable future of the site, create 16 new jobs and safeguard the existing 25 jobs.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Massilly operates in an established niche growth market supplying the UK SME sector and is now operating at full capacity. It has seen its turnover increase by 25% over the last three years and this investment in additional plant and equipment will enable it to exploit further growth opportunities.

“I am delighted support from the Welsh Government helped secure this investment for Wales which will result in a significant increase in the company's production capacity while also safeguarding and creating jobs.”

Thanks to that investment effort, the Massilly group wants to strengthen its position in the UK tin plate aerosol cans market by offering local manufacturing and support to its customers.

“We definitively believe that giving a local solution to our customers is the most efficient way to fulfil their expectations. We have developed the same model in Spain for the south of Europe and also in Germany and Russia. Our European network, associated with our local structures, help us to deliver specialist expertise, as well as flexibility,”

said Thomas Bindschedler, CEO of Massilly Group.

The company was supported in its application to the Welsh Government for this discretionary grant by advisory firm Broomfield & Alexander. Director of Grants, Mike Fenwick, commented:

“We were delighted to support Massilly UK with the application process, which involved agreeing key terms and conditions, and

preparing the supporting business plans and financial forecasts to ensure that the application met with the Welsh Government's own criteria, as well as complying with European State Aid rules. The investment is great news for Wales and the local economy and we wish Massilly every success with its new investment."

Massilly UK, established in Wales since 1984 is based at Hendy Industrial Estate, Pontarddulais, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Massilly Holding SA, a private family company headquartered in Macon, France, which has 28 subsidiary companies in Europe as well as Canada, South Africa, Russia and India.

The Swansea plant entered the UK aerosol market in 2012 – the second largest in Europe producing 1billion cans per annum – targeting the SME sector. The quality of its products, which is considered superior to imported products, has given it a major competitive advantage in winning new business.

School uniform fund approved for 2017-18

The grant is available to pupils in year 7 of maintained schools in Wales who are eligible for free school meals, and to pupils in special schools, special needs resource bases and pupil referral units who are aged 11 at the start of the school year and who are eligible for free school meals.

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, said:

"Chosen by each school, school uniforms provide students with a school identity; strengthen school and individual spirit and pride – not unlike the way team kit builds identity, morale and self-esteem. Every child can appreciate wearing a school uniform is a powerful rite of passage, and an equally powerful statement of belonging.

"This fund is about making sure everyone in Wales, no matter what their background, has the opportunity to feel their best and thrive at school. I remain committed to closing the achievement gap between the pupils from our most deprived communities and those from more prosperous areas."