
Trade Minister Lord Maude resigns

Lord Maude has resigned as Trade Minister. His successor, Mark Price, will be given peerage before taking up the role in April. Mark Price, outgoing managing director of Waitrose, has worked for the John Lewis Partnership, which owns Waitrose, for more than 30 years and had been tipped to take over as chair of Channel 4. (Source: [The Guardian](#))

5,000 jobs vacant in UK automotive due to skills shortage

Up to 5,000 job vacancies in the UK automotive industry could be vacant due to a skills shortage affecting the sector, according to a new report published by the Automotive Council. [The report](#) surveys a range of British-based automotive firms, from vehicle manufacturers to component suppliers, to identify the areas of employment most difficult to recruit, and provide an important means for industry and government to tackle the skills issue. Around 19% of the unfilled vacancies cited in the report are identified as 'critical' and having a significant impact on company operations. Of the top 10 job types for which recruitment is most difficult, the majority are in engineering – with the top two in-demand roles being design and production engineers. The knock-on effect, according to the report, is that companies are hiring temporary contractors and increasingly recruiting from abroad. **Skills Minister Nick Boles said**, "Our automotive workforce is the most productive in Europe and this goes a long way to explaining why production hit record levels last year. But this report shows we cannot be complacent. The sector needs to maintain its high productivity and international competitiveness and address the required demand of skilled workforce, engineers and designers. That's why our apprenticeship reforms are putting employers in the driving seat, to deliver the high-tech, long-term skills our economy needs."

The Automotive Industrial Partnership is a good example of government and industry working together, and I welcome this report." (Source: [SMMT](#))

London Mayor launches 'no idling' scheme and £5m fund to tackle air pollution

Drivers using Tower Bridge will be encouraged to stop idling and switch their engines off when the bridge is opening to help lower emissions and boost air quality. Tower Bridge is raised around 900 times a year, affecting some of the 31,000 vehicles crossing the river on the bridge each day. Now new road signs will provide a simple approach to helping drivers save fuel and reduce emissions by knowing when there will be a long wait. The scheme, delivered by Southwark and Tower Hamlets and jointly funded by the Mayor of London, is part of the Mayor's £20 million Air Quality Fund (MAQF), which has supported bold pollution-busting projects across the capital over the past three years. The Mayor also announced projects across 28 boroughs which will benefit from a share of £5 million from his fund. They include:

- Installing electric vehicle charging points on lamp posts in Hounslow;
- Green courier service in Waltham Forest;
- A community "No to NO₂" project in Haringey supporting school walking zones and cycle maintenance workshops to boost cycling and walking in the borough;
- Dust enforcement officers on building sites - improving air quality in the construction industry by supporting the Mayor's strict emission standards for construction machinery and helping to deliver trials of new technology to reduce the need for old polluting equipment.

In addition, the Mayor has announced his intention to award £1 million to at least two flagship 'Low Emission Neighbourhoods' in the capital. Nine boroughs have been chosen to work up proposals for transforming a local neighbourhood with a host of measures to improve walking, cycling and air quality.

(Source: [London Assembly](#))

Environmental Audit Committee: New Chair

Mary Creagh MP has been elected as the new chair of the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC). The post of chair was vacated last month by Huw Irranca-Davies MP after he announced he was preparing to leave Parliament to stand for election in the Welsh Assembly. (Source: [EAC](#))

PM to make EU reform case in Germany

David Cameron is to make his final speech on EU reform before the summit in Brussels next week. He is expected to use the speech in Hamburg to set out the 'wider agenda' behind his renegotiation of Britain's EU membership. It is his final major speech before next week's meeting of EU leaders where he hopes to secure agreement for the renegotiation of the UK's membership. It comes as 130 Tory councillors urged him to admit his EU talks had failed. The Prime Minister is keen to get a final deal in place in time for him to put the new terms of membership to the British public in a referendum in June. (Source: [BBC](#))

New Buses Bill to deliver a better deal for the public

Bus travel is to be made more passenger-friendly as councils will be given more freedom to improve services. Roads Minister Andrew Jones said reforms will help deliver better journeys across the country, as he delivered a keynote speech at the UK Bus Summit. Under the changes in the Buses Bill, councils will be given the choice to franchise services and enter into new partnerships with providers. Councils will not have to use the new powers and they may decide they are happy with the arrangements already in place. The reforms are designed to give them new tools to drive up standards in the interests of residents. Local authorities will be given new powers to enter into stronger partnerships with bus companies, and agree minimum standards for services, improving reliability and punctuality. (Source: [DfT](#))

Apprenticeships inquiry

The Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy has launched an inquiry on apprenticeships. This inquiry is set to look at issues such as the Government's target of three million apprentices by 2020, how the Government proposes to achieve this, and how this may affect the 'skills gap' in the UK. The sub-Committee is also likely to look at the apprenticeship levy, the proposed Institute for Apprenticeships, and routes to achieving higher level apprenticeship qualifications. The deadline for written submissions is Friday 18 March 2016.

(Source: [Commons Select Committee](#))

ONS – Index of Production

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) this week show total production output is estimated to have decreased by 0.5% between Quarter 3 (July to Sep) 2015 and Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2015. This decrease was larger than the forecasted decrease of 0.2% contained within the Gross Domestic Product: Preliminary Estimate, Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2015.

(Source: [ONS](#))

White is Britain's favourite car colour for third year running

Figures released by SMMT show white has retained its position as the UK's most popular new car colour for the third year running, with demand growing 2.2% to 564,393 units. Of the 2,635,518 new cars registered in 2015, 21.4% were white, compared with less than 1% a decade ago. The preference for white across most of the UK was not mirrored in the South East where more black cars were registered than white. (Source: [SMMT](#))

Week ahead

From Friday 12 February, the House of Commons and the House of Lords will be in recess until 22 February 2016