

## £1 million to boost skills for UK innovation - UKCES

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) has launched a new competition challenging manufacturing firms to maximise the value of innovation. Manufacturing firms have been invited to bid for a share of £1 million to boost UK innovation. The 'Skills for Innovation in Manufacturing' competition challenges firms to come up with new ways of developing the skills and business practices needed to maximise the value of innovation to the UK economy. In recent years, the UK has risen up the Global Innovation Index, moving from 14th in 2010 to second place in 2014. However, a government assessment of the UK's science and innovation system, undertaken for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2014, identified planning, recruiting, training, retention, progression and performance management as weak parts of the system, with worrying deficiencies in basic skills, STEM skills and management. Businesses' skills, workplace practices, and management are critical to ensuring the value of innovation is maximised. The [competition](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-million-available-to-help-uk-manufacturing-firms-develop-skills-to-maximise-value-of-innovation) closes at midday on Wednesday 11 March 2015. (Source: UKCES) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-million-available-to-help-uk-manufacturing-firms-develop-skills-to-maximise-value-of-innovation>



## UK economy records fastest growth since 2007

The UK's economy grew by 2.6% last year, the fastest pace since 2007 and up from 1.7% in 2013, official figures have shown. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed the economy grew by 0.5% in the final three months of 2014. That was a slowdown from 0.7% growth recorded in the previous three months. Economists were mixed over whether the loss of momentum in the final quarter might be temporary or prolonged. (Source: BBC) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-30999206>

## Government expands Growth Deals

As part of its long-term plan to build a stronger economy and a fairer society, government is investing a further £1 billion in local economies across England by expanding the Growth Deals. Agreement has been reached with all 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to expand significantly the Growth Deals that were struck last July. Government says the funding, will be devolved from central government to local authorities, businesses, colleges and universities to help to train young people, create thousands of new jobs, build thousands of new homes and start hundreds of infrastructure project, including transport improvements and superfast broadband networks. Some of the major projects that are being taken forward as part of the expansion of Growth Deals are:

- Improving infrastructure and unlocking developments;
- Funding for projects around the country to boost the skills that local businesses need;
- Investment in innovation and new technologies to enable cities and communities to compete globally;
- Funding for broadband networks in areas where provision is not currently available.

(Source: Prime Minister's Office)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/growth-deals-gain-momentum-firing-up-local-economies>

## Low Emission Strategy for Scotland

The Scottish government's draft Low Emission Strategy was launched this month for consultation. The purpose of the Low Emission Strategy is to draw together the various policies being implemented and developed across a range of central and local government portfolios which have the potential to improve air quality, and present these within a coherent overall framework, setting a new refocused agenda for action. The Strategy sets out the contribution that better air quality can make to sustainable economic growth and quality of life for the citizens of Scotland. The [consultation](#) will close on 10 April 2014.

(Source: The Scottish Government)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2015/01/3287>

## Transport Minister promotes UK transport expertise abroad

Transport Minister Baroness Kramer visited Taiwan and Japan (26 to 30 January 2015) to raise the profile of UK companies in the rail and transport sector. She met the new Taipei City Mayor Ko Wen-je and Deputy Mayor Teng Chia-Ji to discuss urban regeneration and smart city planning as well as public transport safety issues. In Japan, Baroness Kramer visited Hitachi, Toyota, and Nissan. The minister emphasised the vital importance of retaining this investment and had fruitful discussion on strengthening research and development cooperation, and the sharing of expertise in the transport sector especially in rail, ultra-low emission vehicles and driverless technology. (Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-minister-promotes-uk-transport-expertise-in-taiwan-and-japan>



## Highways Agency Chief Executive to step down

The Chief Executive of the Highways Agency (HA), Graham Dalton, announced that he is leaving his post in the summer. Graham Dalton has been in the post for the last seven years, and the agency credited him for leading the office during the international credit crunch, and for "establishing a strong reputation for efficiency" throughout his tenure. Before joining the HA, Mr Dalton worked at the Department for Transport as its director of projects for three years. A Highways Agency spokesman told BusinessCar the recruitment process for his replacement has started. "The successor will be announced at some point during the summer and Graham will be on hand to help with the handover process," the spokesman said.

(Source: DfT and Businesscar)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/highways-agency-chief-executive-to-step-down>

<http://www.businesscar.co.uk/news/2015/highways-agency-chief-executive-graham-dalton-to-step-down>

## Week ahead

### Commons Committee

Monday 2 February

- Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (5.15pm, room 8) – Constitutional implications to draft Scotland clauses

Wednesday 4 February

- Environmental Audit Committee (2.15pm, room tbc) – Climate change adaptation

### Lords Chamber

Thursday 5 February

- Deregulation Bill: Report