

£12 million boost for UK bus sector announced

Transport Minister Norman Baker MP has announced the launch of the fourth round of the Green Bus Fund. This will provide £12 million funding for 213 new low carbon buses to cut carbon emissions, encourage economic growth and provide better services for passengers. The announcement is seen as a welcome boost to the UK bus sector where registrations are down almost 30% versus a strong 2012. In total, four rounds of the fund, worth £87 million, have been announced, and will have delivered more than 1,200 new low carbon buses in England, saving around 28,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year. Government is paying up to half the cost difference between low carbon diesel-hybrid and biomethane gas buses and their standard diesel equivalent. Five bus manufacturers will benefit from orders for their eco-friendly hybrid, electric and gas buses, with many of them being assembled in the UK. The manufacturers which stand to benefit are Alexander Dennis Limited, BYD, Optare, Scania and Volvo. The winners, who will add 83 single-decker and 130 double-decker buses to their fleets, are spread across England and include Stagecoach and First Group. The local councils involved in the initiative include the City of York, Greater Manchester, Nottingham City and Transport for London. Norman Baker has asked the Department for Transport to explore options for further green initiatives to make full use of the remainder of the available funding in this financial year. Commenting on the announcement, Mr Baker stated: Buses are an essential part of people's day-to-day lives up and down the country and are a key tool for enabling economic growth. At the same time, we want this growth to be green, which is why we are investing in these brand new low carbon buses. "The last 3 rounds of the Green Bus Fund have shown that bus operators and local authorities are keen to invest in environmentally friendly technology, and it is encouraging to see this strong interest in ultra-low emission vehicles continuing through the fourth round of the fund." (Source: DfT) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/12-million-boost-for-greener-bus-journeys>

Seven government departments agree spending cuts

Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne MP, has announced that agreement has been reached with seven Whitehall departments on spending for 2015. The Departments where cuts of between 8-10% have been agreed are HM Treasury, Department for Energy and Climate Change, Cabinet Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for Communities and Local Government, Northern Ireland Office, and Ministry of Justice. Mr Osborne stated that negotiations over savings are continuing with other big departments. The full financial details of the cuts will be held back until the spending review is presented to Parliament on 26 June. (Source: BBC) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22684993>



Talent Retention Solution scheme gathers momentum

Over 3,500 engineers, students and apprentices have already signed up to the flagship industry scheme, Talent Retention Solution (TRS), designed to match engineering talent with new job opportunities. TRS brings together specialists whose jobs may be at risk or people who want to work in engineering - with companies that are looking to recruit skilled staff to satisfy growth in their companies. Launched in 2011, TRS, was created by business for business and the scheme has now grown to include over 600 companies of all sizes supporting a number of sectors

including aerospace, electronics, energy, construction and automotive, covering both large companies and SMEs. Commenting on the announcement, Business Secretary Vince Cable MP stated: "What I like most about the TRS is how simple it is. It's like an 'eBay' for engineers that matches vacancies with talent. With successful manufacturers constantly telling me they struggle to recruit engineers, I hope the popularity of the TRS will encourage even more people to sign up – especially small businesses who can use it for free." (Source: BIS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/talent-retention-taken-to-new-levels>

Semta launch review of National Occupational Standards

Semta, the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies is leading a major review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) to ensure the current standards are fit for purpose and to find out from employers and stakeholders what changes might be required. The current suites of NOS and qualifications were developed in partnership with employers and other appropriate organisations such as the professional institutions, trade bodies, training providers and higher education. NOS set out the skills, knowledge and understanding required by employees to undertake a particular task or job role to a nationally recognised level of competence, helping formalise and standardise training requirements across the UK. The NOS directly inform the quality, content and assessment requirements of vocational qualifications especially competence qualifications (NVQs) included in all Semta Apprenticeship Frameworks.

Commenting on the announcement, Semta Apprenticeship Director, Bill Twigg, stated: "It is extremely important that we have a programme of continuous improvement to keep up with the rapid expansion of new technologies and processes in our sector. We want to hear from those employers, employees and training providers as to the strengths and any weaknesses. It is imperative to the future of the UK economy that we deliver world class standards, through academic and vocational qualifications leading to a highly-skilled, motivated and flexible workforce." (Source: Semta)

<http://semta.org.uk/media/press-releases/help-develop-world-class-standards-for-industry>



Industry outlook for carbon prices to remain low to 2020

PWC's annual survey examining views of carbon market investors, traders and advisors has found that the value of carbon allowances traded on the EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) won't recover to pre recession levels before 2020, raising concerns about the long term impact of the UK's carbon price floor for energy intensive businesses in the UK. The outlook for price recovery remains weak according to members, due to the oversupply of allowances, reduced demand and policy uncertainty. Respondents to the survey also overwhelmingly backed intervention by the European Commission to reform the EU ETS within 12 months. The Council is due to vote on proposals in June, but the survey shows that respondents feel the proposals will not go far enough to boost values. (Source: PWC)

<http://www.ukmediacentre.pwc.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaID=2>

Week ahead

Commons Committee

Monday 3 June

Transport Committee (4:05pm, Grimond room)

Access to transport for people with disabilities

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 4 June

9:30am – 11:00am: Future of vocational education (Nic Dakin, Lab, Scunthorpe)

2:30pm – 4:00pm: Support for science and research (Dr Julian Huppert, Lib Dem, Cambridge)

Wednesday 5 June

11:00am – 11:30am: Strengthening the UK manufacturing sector through innovation (Caroline Dineage, Con, Gosport)