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## Hammond's first and last Autumn Statement

Delivering his first Autumn Statement, the Tory chancellor, Philip Hammond, claimed that the UK is "resilient", despite forecasts that government finances will be much worse off than previously expected by 2020.

Hammond said that the government would not now seek to deliver a surplus in 2019-20, but that he remained "firmly committed to seeing the public finances return to balance as soon as practicable".

**Economy** The forecast for growth this year has been revised upwards to 2.1%, according to the estimates from the Office for Business Responsibility (OBR), the independent body which advises the Treasury. However, the OBR expects growth to slow to 1.4% in 2017 – a downwards revision from the previous forecast of 2.2%.

For the following years, the OBR forecasts show a recovery to 1.7% growth in 2018, 2.1% in 2019 and 2020, and 2.0% in 2021.

The OBR forecast on public sector borrowing is £68.2 billion this year, then £59 billion in 2017-18, £46.5 billion in 2018-19, £21.9 billion in 2019-20 and £20.7 billion in 2020-21.

The government's finances are forecast to be £122 billion worse off in the period until 2021 than thought in March's Budget. Debt will rise from 84.2% of GDP last year to 87.3% this year, peaking at 90.2% in 2017-18, said Hammond.

The OBR forecast for inflation – under the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) – is for a 0.7% rise this year, rising rapidly next year to 2.3% then 2.5% in 2018 after which it slips back to 2.1%, finishing at 2.0% in both 2020 and 2021.

**Pensions** The chancellor said that the triple lock in the uprating of the state pension will remain throughout this parliament. However, he said: "As we look ahead to the next parliament, we will need to ensure we tackle the challenges of rising longevity and fiscal sustainability."

"And so the government will review public spending priorities and other commitments for the next parliament in light of the evolving fiscal position at the next Spending Review."

The National Pensioners' Convention was unimpressed: "It will only offer a £3 a week rise next April and just £1.80 for millions of older women. The inadequacy of the state pension certainly won't be solved by 2020 if this is how we intend to go on."

**National Living Wage** The statutory wage will increase from £7.20 to £7.50 an hour in April next year. "That's a pay rise worth over £500 a year to a full-

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time worker," according to Hammond. However, the new rate is still 95p an hour less than the voluntary UK Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation and £2.25 an hour less than the London rate.

It may have been Hammond's first Autumn Statement, but it will also be his last. The chancellor told the Commons: "I am abolishing the Autumn Statement.

"No other major economy makes hundreds of tax changes twice a year, and neither should we.

"So the spring Budget in a few months will be the final spring Budget."

Starting in autumn 2017, there will be an autumn Budget, announcing tax changes well in advance of the start of the tax year.

And from 2018 there will be a Spring Statement, responding to the forecast from the OBR, but no major fiscal event.

"If unexpected changes in the economy require it, then I will, of course, announce actions at the Spring Statement, but I won't make significant changes twice a year just for the sake of it," the chancellor said.

[www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/autumn-statement-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/autumn-statement-2016)  
<http://npcuk.org/2469>

## Disability-related sickness top issue

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the union reps responding to the TUC's 2016 Equality Audit said that disability-related sickness absence was the number one equality issue they dealt with at work.

The finding comes from a TUC study published on the first day of Disability History Month.

Disability-related sickness absence was the top equality topic in both public and private sectors, and in all regions and nations of the UK except London. Reps told the TUC that disabled people can have higher or more frequent rates of sickness absence, but that workplace policies were not adjusted to account for this. They said more work was required to ensure managers had adequate training to manage disabled workers.

Most disability-related sickness absence can be more effectively managed through better policies,

implemented in partnership with staff unions, says the TUC. Reasonable changes to the working patterns of disabled members of staff – such as being able to work flexibly or work from home and to have time off for medical appointments – would minimise disability-related sickness absence and discrimination.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Disabled people deserve a fair deal at work. Employers can do much more to remove the barriers that prevent disabled people from working. Adjusting working patterns, open communication with staff and good equality policies all help.

"Unions are working hard to win decent pay, opportunities to training and promotion at work for disabled people. I would urge all disabled people at work to join their union, to make sure they get their voice heard and their interests represented."

Five top tips for union reps supporting disabled people at work are:

- bring disabled workers together to discuss workplace policies and suitable adjustments;
- suggest disability awareness training for managers and union reps;
- ensure effective reasonable adjustments – such as working from home, flexible working arrangements, changes to IT and software and adjustments to any duties – are in place for disabled workers;
- ensure disability-related absence is part of the sickness absence procedure; and
- negotiate paid disability leave, separate to sickness absence.

[www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/disability-issues/disability-related-sickness-absence-biggest-workplace-issue-union](http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/disability-issues/disability-related-sickness-absence-biggest-workplace-issue-union)

## City Sprint latest gig economy target

The delivery firm CitySprint is the latest UK business to be involved in a legal dispute over the gig economy and whether it should treat its freelance couriers as workers.

Mags Dewhurst, who has made deliveries for the firm for more than two years, will argue at a tribunal that she should be given worker status, and the rights that come with it, such as holiday pay and the National Minimum Wage.

The case is the first of four against different courier firms that will be heard by the same judge. The other cases, against Addison Lee, eCourier and Excel, will be heard next year.

Jason Moyer-Lee, general secretary of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), which is backing the riders, said the cyclists worked for one company at a time and were obliged to take work they were given throughout the day.

He said independent contractors were able to send others to do their work, but that was not possible for Dewhurst and the other riders.

"Even though the courier firms say Mags can send a substitute, she can't really, as there are restrictions that prevent that," he said.

Moyer-Lee said the point of the cases was to test the status of the workers. CitySprint, which has 3,500 self-employed couriers in the UK, could face further claims if the tribunal finds against it.

Last month, in a case backed by the GMB general union, the tribunal found in favour of drivers for the taxi-hailing firm Uber, who argued that they should be classed as workers. Uber has appealed against the ruling.

Matt Gingell, an employment law partner at Gannons Solicitors, said: "The employment tribunal may well be influenced by the Uber decision. But that judgment is not binding and the facts will be different in these cases."

[www.theguardian.com/business/2016/nov/22/citysprint-faces-tribunal-over-treatment-of-freelance-workers](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/nov/22/citysprint-faces-tribunal-over-treatment-of-freelance-workers)

## May in reverse over workers on boards

Prime minister Theresa May appears to have backtracked on her pledge to have workers on company boards.

In her speech to the CBI employers' body annual conference, May said: "While it is important that the voices of workers should be represented, I can categorically tell you that this is not about mandating works councils, or the direct appointment of workers or trade union representatives on boards."

Which is – and no surprise for a politician – a change to what she said earlier.

In a July 2015 speech during the leadership campaign, she said: "If I'm prime minister we're going to change that system – and we're going to have not

just consumers represented on company boards, but employees as well."

Even at the Conservative Party conference, she told delegates that the government will publish plans "later this year" on having consumers and workers represented on company boards.

May told the party faithful: "Too often the people who are supposed to hold big business accountable are drawn from the same, narrow social and professional circles as the executive team.

"Too often the scrutiny they provide is not good enough."

Just over a month later, May was telling the CBI conference: "We will shortly publish our plans to reform corporate governance, including executive pay and accountability to shareholders, and proposals to ensure the voice of employees is heard in the boardroom."

A green paper is to be published "later this autumn". This no doubt will be followed by a consultation, a white paper and further consultation before any legal changes will be put forward.

However, as well as rejecting union representation, she also dismissed the idea of "creating German-style binary boards which separate the running of the company from the inputs of shareholders, employees, customers or suppliers. Our unitary board system has served us well and will continue to do so."

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Theresa May made a clear promise to have workers represented on company boards. The proposals in her speech do not deliver on this.

"This is not the way to show that you want to govern for ordinary working people."

Stefan Stern, director of the High Pay Centre, said May's change of tack "put her in the unfortunate position of sounding like the stereotypical bad boss, who makes a promise at the staff meeting only to renege on it when the going gets tough".

He added: "The voice of employees is what has been missing from the board-level discussion on executive pay over the past two decades. That lack of voice has led us to where we are today, where almost everyone agrees that top pay has become absurdly excessive. It would be a great pity were the government to surrender to the inertia that has

prevented substantial progress on excessive pay during that time, and snatch ignominious defeat from the jaws of something close to a worthwhile victory.”

[www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cbi-annual-conference-2016-prime-ministers-speech](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cbi-annual-conference-2016-prime-ministers-speech)

<http://highpaycentre.org/blog/meet-the-new-boss-same-as-the-old-boss>

## Young face social mobility problem

Social mobility in Britain is getting worse for young people, with many trapped in low-paid jobs

The Social Mobility Commission's *State of the Nation 2016* report warns that social mobility problems in Britain are deeply entrenched, and that those born in the 1980s are the first post-war cohort to start their working years with lower incomes than their predecessors.

The education system and a two-tier, hollowed out labour market are major contributing factors, according to the report. It says only one in 10 people manage to break out of low-paid jobs, and only one in eight children from low-income backgrounds is likely to become a high-income earner as an adult.

The report makes several recommendations around the skills system and job market. It calls on the government to work with businesses to define a “new deal” around organisations' social obligations and to ban unpaid internships.

It also calls on more businesses to become Living Wage employers and to develop strategies to provide lower-skilled workers with more structured career progression.

According to the report, the “piecemeal approach” of initiatives such as the apprenticeship levy and National Living Wage, which “risk overwhelming some businesses” in low margin sectors, should be replaced by a “partnership” model.

On education, the commission recommends the development of a single UCAS-style portal to contain information about vocational routes as well as academic ones. It calls on the government to crack down on low-quality apprenticeships.

Alan Milburn, chair of the commission, said: “The rungs on the social mobility ladder are growing further apart. It is becoming harder for this generation of struggling families to move up.

“Fundamental reforms are needed in our country's education system, labour market, and local economies to address Britain's social mobility problem. That should be the holy grail of public policy, the priority for government, and the cause that unites the nation to action.”

[www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/social-mobility-in-britain-getting-worse-says-government-report](http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/social-mobility-in-britain-getting-worse-says-government-report)

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/569412/Social\\_Mobility\\_2016\\_Summary\\_final.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569412/Social_Mobility_2016_Summary_final.pdf)

## Survey on risks of cleaning agents

New and more powerful cleaning products are becoming more and more common in the workplace – but how do the chemicals they contain affect people's health and safety?

That is a question that a new UNISON health and safety survey sets out to answer after the public services union became aware of several incidents. Workers have developed breathing problems and even been overcome by fumes in some cases.

Although the use, and potential misuse, of more powerful cleaning products might be sparked by increasing awareness of so-called superbugs, such as *C. difficile* and MRSA, the problem is not confined to the health sector.

UNISON is, therefore, asking cleaners – and others who regularly do cleaning work – to take part in the survey, wherever they work. The survey will run until Monday 19 December and aims to find out the extent of the problem, and what can be done to keep staff safe.

UNISON understands the anxieties over superbugs which are hard to eradicate, said Robert Baughan, assistant national officer of the union's health and safety department, but “what we have seen is employers looking for short cuts by using more and more powerful cleaning agents, which can pose a real risk to the health of both staff and the public if they are used incorrectly”.

The survey can be found online at: [surveymonkey.co.uk/r/TJ682RJ](http://surveymonkey.co.uk/r/TJ682RJ) or by following the link below.

If someone affected doesn't have a computer or smartphone, they should ask their union rep or branch to fill it in on their behalf.

[www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2016/11/cleaning-survey/](http://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2016/11/cleaning-survey/)