

WEEKLY BRIEFING

5 April 2024



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Labour on course to win more than 400 seats and majority of 154, YouGov poll suggests

YouGov has released polling suggesting Labour is on course to win more than 400 seats at the general election, and a majority of 154. This would be an even bigger win for Labour than projected by the last YouGov MRP poll, carried out in January. The MRP poll suggests the Conservatives are on course to win just 155 seats, which would be a worse result than the party suffered in 1997 under John Major. YouGov also says its poll suggests Reform UK would come second in 36 constituencies, but would not come close to winning any of them.

National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage increases comes into effect

Millions of workers across the UK have received a pay increase after the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rose on 1 April. From this date, employees aged 21 and over became entitled to the National Living Wage (previously, the qualifying age was 23). The rate increased to £11.44 an hour, up from £10.42. For younger employees who receive the National Minimum Wage, the rates have increased to £6.40 an hour for 16-17 year olds and £8.60 for 18-20 year olds. The real living wage and London living wage have also just risen by 10%. "[The rise] will be welcomed by all UK low earners, putting more money in their pockets, at a time when the cost of living remains high", said Kate Smith, head of pensions at Aegon, adding that the increase is good news for pension saving too.

Food price fears as Brexit import charges revealed

The government has revealed how much companies will have to pay to import foods from the EU due to Brexit, saying the fees would pay for "world-class border facilities" to protect biosecurity - preventing the import of plant and animal disease. The fee, known as the "common user charge", will apply to animal products, plants and plant products entering the UK from the EU through the Port of Dover and the Eurotunnel at Folkestone. It will be charged per type of

good imported - the "commodity line" - and will apply to goods deemed low, medium and high risk. But the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) said the policy would "undoubtedly increase costs, potentially reduce consumer choice, and increase the likelihood of empty shelves". The new border checks will be phased in gradually over the next 12 months.

TRADE UPDATE

Hundreds of border force officers to walk out for four days next week

More than 600 Border Force officers at Heathrow airport will strike over 11-14 April in a dispute over a new roster and changes to shift patterns. It comes after Border Force members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) at Heathrow last month voted by 90% in favour of action. The PCS said the proposed changes to its members' working arrangements "will particularly affect workers with disabilities or those with caring responsibilities". Speaking late last week, PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote said: "Ministers have 14 days to withdraw these unfair and unnecessary proposals or our members at Heathrow will take strike action."

Half of Britons to travel abroad this year despite cost concerns

Half (51%) of Britons plan to travel abroad this year despite concerns about holiday costs – rising to 58% of younger people aged between 16 and 34 – new research reveals. Three-in-five (60%) have already booked their holiday, although almost a quarter (23%) are waiting to book in the hope of securing a discounted late package, according to Post Office Travel Money research. The study confirms that holidays abroad are a priority for many Britons. But half (51%) of those planning overseas travel admit that they will have to dip into savings in order to fund their trip abroad.

Delayed end to liquid rule risks 'significant' disruption, trade warned

Trade bodies have warned of potentially "significant delays" and "further inconvenience" to Brits travelling abroad after the government admitted not every major UK airport would meet its 1 June deadline to upgrade security equipment. The Department for Transport (DfT) estimates only half of all passengers will be processed by the new scanners that will allow travellers to carry more liquids in their bags by June. The new scanners detect prohibited items with greater accuracy, meaning passengers no longer need to take items out of their hand luggage.

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways - British Airways is raising capacity by 10% between London and Barbados this summer. A new Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner is being deployed on the route from Gatwick for the season while frequency from Heathrow is being increased. BA chief planning and strategy officer Neil Chernoff said: "As British Airways celebrates its 70th year of connecting London and Barbados, we are thrilled to be increasing capacity on the route with a larger aircraft and the launch of a new double daily service from Heathrow. This is a testament to the popularity of the route from a leisure and business perspective, and its importance as a link for visiting friends and relatives."

TUI - Tui has added 345,000 seats to its summer 2025 programme, bringing the total to 10.2 million flight seats on sale from 19 airports across the UK. The biggest change comes with an additional aircraft based at Exeter, providing an extra 80,000 seats from the southwest airport. The airport gains a new route to Ibiza, plus year-round flying to Tenerife and Lanzarote. Antalya, Heraklion, Paphos and Rhodes will now operate twice a week, giving Exeter passengers the opportunity to book 10- and 11-night holidays. Other airports have also seen extra capacity, with increased frequencies and new services.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic said it is "on course to return to profitability" in 2024, after seeing record revenues in 2023. The carrier's full-year revenue reached £3.1 billion, up by £265 million on 2022, while losses before tax and exceptional items narrowed to £139 million, from £206 million in 2022. The airline, co-owned by Sir Richard Branson and Delta Air Lines, carried 5.3 million passengers in 2023, with a load factor of 77%. It said in a statement: "Due to robust customer demand for premium leisure air travel and holidays, 2023 passenger revenue was reported at £2.4 billion – the highest on record and up £323 million versus 2022, despite corporate travel being slower to return to pre-pandemic levels."

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Barrhead Travel - Barrhead Travel boss Jacqueline Dobson says there has been a "clear shift" among the agency's customers towards spring getaways as the annual holiday calendar "evolves". Dobson on Tuesday (2 April) revealed the Scottish independent's passenger numbers jumped by 20% over the Easter weekend compared with the same period last year. Demand for the final weeks of the winter season remains high across Barrhead's retail network with around 10% of new

bookings made during the past week being for April departures. Booking patterns show customers – particularly families – have been taking advantage of an early Easter to go away for longer early in the spring.

Brand USA - NYC Tourism + Conventions chief executive Fred Dixon is announced as the new lead at Brand USA, the nation's travel marketing organisation. He will leave his current role on June 5 before starting as president and chief executive of Brand USA on July 15. Dixon will succeed Chris Thompson, who announced his retirement from Brand USA in July 2023.

Intrepid Travel - Intrepid Travel to run the first women's tours to Saudi Arabia. The tours will be led by female leaders and guides, aiming to showcase a different side of the country beyond luxury resorts and high-end offerings, according to the operator. Starting in Riyadh and finishing in Jeddah, groups will stay in a female-owned boutique hotel, heritage property and desert camp, directly supporting a total of nine female-owned and operated businesses.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram tests new feature for private content sharing

Instagram is testing 'Blend', a new private feed between users within the app, based on the videos that have been previously shared and reel interests. Instagram has noted that they have seen an increase in reel sharing via direct message, so have begun testing this new feature to facilitate a more integrated way of reel sharing. This feature will be valuable to content creators as it will enhance content discovery within group chats and private chats between friends.

LinkedIn testing new video feed

LinkedIn has seen the popularity of TikTok and the increasing engagement of Instagram reels and is experimenting with how they can utilise video-based content on their own platform. They are testing a new dedicated feed just for video content, in a similar style to TikTok. It will be a full screen display and users will be able to share, like and comment on videos. The push for video content will encourage LinkedIn influencers to start making more short-form video content, make brands experiment with new ways to create advertising content for their page outside of still images and text, and also make for a more engaging experience for users.

MICE UPDATE

Attendees spending longer at bigger exhibitions, suggests report

According to the latest Size and Scale Index for Exhibitions report, the total number of event days and total gross event space sold has increased since 2022 and is now broadly on a par with pre-Covid figures. The eighth SASIE report, published by the Events Industry Alliance (EIA) – the collective associations of AEO, AEV and ESSA, is a deep dive analysis of how the UK exhibition scene is performing.

With over 1,000 exhibitions, the 2023 report also shows the number of exhibitions were up significantly and at comparable levels to the pre-Covid period. The increase in events in 2023 is partly explained by a significant upturn in conference events (with minimum 500sqm of exhibition space) but also many new consumer events, impacting positively on totals.

LIGHTER NOTE

Lighter note: A rare newborn giraffe "kicked up her heels" on its first foray outdoors at Chester Zoo. See more [here](#).