



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Mortgage applications steady in the UK despite rate rises, says Nationwide

The number of mortgage applications has not declined yet despite interest rates rising to the highest level in 15 years, Nationwide has said. However, the building society said the sharp increase in borrowing costs was likely to cause a "significant drag" on activity in the housing market. Nationwide's latest data revealed house prices dropped 3.5% in the year to June, the largest fall since 2009. The Bank of England has raised interest rates in an attempt to slow inflation. The Bank's base rate, which usually dictates the borrowing costs of lenders, is at 5%. Rob Gardner, Nationwide's chief economist, told the BBC's Today programme that mortgage repayments were now taking up almost 40% of people's average take home pay compared to 30% previously. However, although the cost of borrowing money over longer terms had risen, it had "yet to have the same negative impact on sentiment", Mr Gardner said in Nationwide's latest report.

Plan to train more doctors more quickly in England

Medical degrees could be shortened by a year and there will be thousands more university places for medical students, in a major plan to boost the NHS workforce in England. The plan, which has been delayed for more than a year, has been called "historic" by NHS leaders. Pay does not feature in the plan - instead, it focuses on increasing training places for medical and nursing students and a new apprenticeship scheme for doctors. A consultation on whether five-year medical degrees could be shortened by a year will also be launched. Currently, half of new doctors and nurses have to be recruited from abroad as the UK supply route has struggled to keep up with demand. One out of every 10 posts remains unfilled - more than 110,000 vacancies and without action, this could rise to 360,000 by 2037, modelling for the plan suggests.

Centrica boss warns energy bills will stay high for foreseeable future

Energy bills are likely to stay high for the foreseeable future, according to the boss of the company that owns British Gas. Centrica chief executive Chris O'Shea said while he believes that the worst of the energy crisis is over, risks remain. A new price cap comes into effect this weekend which will see households with typical energy usage pay £2,074. Mr O'Shea said prices have fallen from the rise caused by the Russian war, but are higher than the long-term average. "I think the first act of the crisis is over," he said. "I think what we've got to remember is the energy prices had more than doubled before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Gas and electricity bills will fall below the £2,500 level that was subsidised by the government under its Energy Price Guarantee scheme. However, under the new price cap, which is set by the regulator Ofgem, household bills will remain £800 more expensive than two years ago.

June 2023 likely to be the UK's hottest on record

The United Kingdom is poised to have the hottest June on record, provisional figures show. Though maximum temperatures were not exceptionally high - the hottest day reached 32.2C - it's been the long-lasting, moderate heat which has shifted it into record-breaking territory, surpassing the Junes of 1940 and 1976. Provisional figures from the Met Office indicate that both the overall average and the average maximum temperatures are the highest on record. Daytime temperatures of at least 25 degrees Celsius lasted for over a fortnight and, with high humidity, the nights provided little respite. Much of the month saw high pressure, which pulled in warm air from the south, and although cooler air arrived during the final week, this hasn't been enough to knock June 2023 off the top spot.

Challenge to public Covid inquiry over Johnson WhatsApps in court

The government's legal challenge to the Covid inquiry's demand to see Boris Johnson's diaries and WhatsApps in full is under way in the High Court. The Cabinet Office rejected the demand, arguing it should not have to hand over material it does not consider relevant. Covid inquiry chair Baroness Hallett says it should be up to her to decide what is relevant. The government took the unprecedented step of bringing a judicial review of Baroness Hallett's order. It is the first time a government has mounted a legal challenge to an inquiry it set up itself. At a High Court hearing on Friday, the Cabinet Office's lawyers will argue that the inquiry does not have the legal power to force ministers to release documents and messages which it says are "unambiguously irrelevant" and cover matters "unconnected to the government's handling of Covid".

TRADE UPDATE

Government invests further £750k to promote aviation careers

The government has invested £750,000 to encourage young people from all backgrounds to consider a career in aviation. Aviation minister Baroness Vere has recently announced the funding will be allocated to several programmes that educate young people about the opportunities available in the sector.

"This investment is crucial to help make the UK the best place in the world for aviation and grow the economy, with a diverse workforce that can effectively address challenges today and in the future," said the minister.

Most Irish agents 'optimistic' after bookings boost on 2019

The Irish Travel Agents Association (ITAA) has reported an optimistic outlook for the remainder of 2023, with the majority of its members enjoying more bookings in the first half of this year compared to Q1 2019. Members said they had medium (56%) or high (44%) levels of optimism for the rest of the year after a boost in bookings compared to pre-pandemic trading.

In comparison to 2019, 16% of ITAA members reported an increase in sales by up to 10%, with another 53% of members reporting increases of more than 10%, while 16% of members have maintained the same level of bookings and the remainder of members saw bookings decrease.

The rate of chargebacks for travel companies has surged over the past few years

New data from travel payment solutions provider Outpayce from Amadeus, published on Tuesday (27 June), claims 70% of global travel companies have seen an increase in chargebacks, with disputes soaring by 30% year-on-year. Respondents say this is due to customers considering chargebacks easier to achieve than refunds as well as due to increased travel awareness. The study also shows that travel firms are almost always unsuccessful when they challenge a chargeback, as only 25% of companies see more than 60% of disputes awarded in their favour.

Gatwick North Terminal set for redevelopment

Gatwick has pledged £10 million towards revamping the airport's North Terminal, with Gatwick claiming the work will improve the terminal experience for hundreds of thousands of passengers.

Scheduled for completion early next year, the project will focus on modernising the departure lounge with new flooring and seating, complete with accessible charging points. Seats will be located across different "mood zones", allowing passengers to spend the time before their flight either shopping, working or relaxing. The lounge will also have a new orientation zone, as well as improved sight lines to help passengers get around more easily.

Holiday intent strong but price hikes impacting people's plans

Holiday intent remains strong among Brits, but price hikes are starting to have a significant impact on people's summer plans, according to new research. Nearly two-thirds of UK consumers (64%) will go on holiday this summer, according to new data from KPMG, with 41% poised to holiday in the UK with 29% planning to head abroad.

A third of consumers, meanwhile, told KPMG their holidays will be more expensive due to a surge in travel prices, while 14% of respondents to the poll of 3,000 consumers said they had been forced to rein in their travel plans due to household bills pressure. In total, more than a third of respondents (36%) said they would not be taking a summer holiday.

Bookings with advantage's Scottish members almost double 2019 levels

Bookings with Advantage Travel Partnership members in Scotland are running at almost double the level they were in 2019, the consortium has revealed. According to data from The Advantage Travel Partnership, members have seen summer sales outperform recent years with bookings up 30% on 2022 and up by 83% compared with 2019 levels. Advantage said the higher than expected rises stem from resurgent demand and an increase in Scottish membership.

AIRLINE UPDATE

EasyJet - EasyJet and easyJet holidays have put their spring 2024 schedule on sale, with tens of thousands of flights and holiday packages available to book. The low-cost carrier announced on 27 June that 60,000 flights to and from the UK are now on sale, with thousands more packages available as part of easyJet holidays' offer.

Global Airlines - New transatlantic carrier Global Airlines has entered into an agreement to acquire a further three A380s. Global Airlines has also announced further appointments to its advisory board; Pierre Madrange and Ian Black. The pair will advise the airline's executive team and work closely with founder and chief executive James Asquith on airline operations management and airline digitalisation.

Hainan Airlines - Scotland has regained a direct air link with China with the resumption of a Hainan Airlines service. The twice-weekly flight from Edinburgh to Beijing resumed 26 June and will run until 6 October.

Jet2 - Jet2.com and Jet2CityBreaks have put their biggest-ever Iceland programme on sale. The boost to the airline and operator's winter 2024/2025 schedule comes in response to strong demand for trips and holidays to Iceland. More than 30,000 seats are now on sale to the destination, representing a 13% increase on winter 2023/2024.

Tap - IAG has been linked with a move for Portuguese legacy carrier Tap, although a deal will depend on the manner in which Tap is privatised. IAG is not the only company to have its sights on the state-owned Portuguese carrier, as other airlines such as Lufthansa and Air France-KLM have also eyed the sale, which could take place as early as next month.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Inspire Group - Inspire Group has put sustainability at the forefront by launching a new website and booking platform for greener holidays. Sustainable Travel by Inspire gives customers up to 5,000 hotels to choose from. All hotels and tour operators present on the website adhere to the standards set by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, the international body for sustainable tourism certifications.

InteleTravel - InteleTravel agents are confident the majority of their clients are ready to spend, or have already spent, as much – or even more – than they did last year, despite clients ranking price hikes as their biggest concern going into the summer. Around a third (36%) of the 1,000 respondents to a new survey of InteleTravel advisors said their clients were spending the same as last year; a quarter (24%) said they were spending up to 25% more; 16% some 25-50% more; and 6% in excess of 50% more.

Latin Routes - Latin Routes has added Mexico to its portfolio of destinations with an initial six itineraries including a gastronomic tour. Mexico follows Panama into the Latin America range, with more new destinations to come from the specialist later this year.

Not Just Travel - Not Just Travel has recently launched an exclusive club for its 5% top-selling cruise agents as part of its £3.4 million expansion strategy. Named Circle of Excellence, the club provides members with mentorship, support and additional training and is led by Not Just Travel senior cruise business development manager Duncan Croucher.

SOCIAL UPDATE

TikTok discontinues its BeReal clone 'TikTok Now'

TikTok is stepping back from the BeReal trend, and retiring '[TikTok Now](#)', which was an in-app function that initially launched in September last year. Despite this, users will still be able to access their previously posted TikTok Now content. The BeReal app itself is also seeing a [decline in users](#), so for TikTok it's likely not a big blow, as they probably weren't actively using the function anyway.

Meta announces expansion of verified programme to all regions

This option was originally launched [back in February](#) for Australian and New Zealand users only, but Meta is now expanding its Meta Verified subscription package to all regions. Although selling verified ticks could help to confirm users identity and combat bots, most have been unwilling to pay so far and have become increasingly wary of whether the blue ticks represent credibility or attention.

MICE UPDATE

Direct ATPI launches Microsoft Teams technology integration

Global business travel management company Direct ATPI has announced a two-phased roll-out plan to allow clients to view, plan and discuss business trips on Microsoft Teams. The company will integrate its profile, invoice, approval and itinerary platform with Microsoft Teams to consolidate the travel process, streamline the client experience. A small group of clients will pilot the tech integration, before it rolls out in full to all Direct ATPI clients in the autumn. Phase one of the integration allows customers to update traveller profiles, view, plan, approve and discuss business trips within one application without the need to use any other products on their browser. Phase two, which is set to launch later in the year, will see the full integration of Direct ATPI's concierge service into Microsoft Teams. This will enable travellers to self-serve and communicate using AI. Microsoft Teams' integration with the TMC's proprietary technology comes following feedback from Direct ATPI's travel buyers. From downloading an itinerary and plane tickets to checking flight times and downloading invoice data, Direct ATPI claims its global communication tool can simplify the travel process, keeping all travel documentation and queries in one space.

LIGHTER NOTE

Headliner Elton John closed Glastonbury Festival with an electric set for the final show of his career. Watch the fireworks [here](#).