
it's our business

newspad of the Employee Share Ownership Centre



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Eighteenth newspad all-employee share plan awards results announced

The results of the 18th edition of the *newspad* All-Employee Share Plan Awards were announced at the Centre's Share Plans Symposium on March 26, and presented by Malcolm Hurlston CBE, founder and life president.

We thank judges, **Damian Carnell** (founder director, Corpgro), **Kevin Lim** (independent employee share plans consultant) and **John Hoffmire** (research associate at the *Centre for Mutual and Co-owned Business* at *University of Oxford's Kellogg College*; curator *Oxford Employee Ownership Symposium*) for generously giving their time and expertise. They were joined in their deliberations by Centre president, Malcolm Hurlston CBE and chairman Robert Pay.

Judges were impressed by the overall high quality of this year's entries, though this did make picking an outright winner challenging!

Nine companies in all were shortlisted for the awards over the following categories:

1. Best all-employee share plan
2. Best share plan communications
3. Best use of technology, AI or behavioural science
4. Best share plan response to significant changes or challenging situations



Jessica Macskimming accepts the award for best all-employee share plan for RS Group

Shortlisted for Category 1 – Best all-employee share plan, were:

Diageo; The Magnum Ice Cream Company; Jet2; and RS Group.

For this category judges compared the effectiveness in bringing together a diverse workforce in large multi-national companies to help achieve key corporate goals, extending employee engagement in smaller organisations and judged on how successfully the share plan met company objectives.

The winning company's *All-Employee Share Plan* was linked to its DE&I messaging. It was personally supported by the ceo who said that the plan was to help staff feel they belonged and expressed well how employees are valued within the company. This, along with the company's philosophies of Super Simplicity, and "Transcreation", made a strong impression. Even though this company has only 8,000 employees, it still decided to do a worldwide plan, in 36 markets. The judges wanted to recognise this as it showed strong dedication to the value of employee share ownership.

WINNER: RS Group



AWARDS



Given the high standard of the shortlisted entries, the judges recognised **TWO** further companies.

The first was praised for its commitment to continuing employee ownership in its new focus after its recent de-merger (indeed, judges were surprised not to see a nomination in the best share plan response to significant changes or challenging situations category, since this was a major corporate event and change). Its “Celebration Reward” was offered to staff in no fewer than 80 countries.

Highly commended: **The Magnum Ice Cream Company**

The second commendation is for a plan which was well implemented, offering shares to a large global workforce, with a communications programme which reflected its disparate employees. Impressively 80 percent of all those eligible took part in the plan. The company, which has been granting award-winning share plans consistently, was praised for its long-term commitment.

Highly commended: **Diageo**



Lindsey Spencer and Lois Schmigylski accept Diageo's commendation.

Shortlisted for Category 2 – Best all-employee share plan communications were:

Associated British Foods; BT Group; Centrica; Diageo; easyJet; Jet2; and RS Group.

Communication is key to the success or failure of an all-employee share scheme. This award category highlights the need for programmes that are sensitive to the individual circumstances of a company and the make-up of its workforce.

The high quality of share plan communications in this year's submissions is reflected in the number of entrants shortlisted. For the winning entry's *2020 Saveshare Maturity*, comms and tech went hand-in-hand. Judges particularly liked how the comms explained why employees should participate and the continued hand-holding on offer after launch of scheme. This and the impact of 'front end' comms on increased participation, the judges felt, made its programme stand out from the crowd.

The programme was well written, and went right through to the education and modelling tools, including specific help in transferring to an ISA.

WINNER: BT Group



Anna Watch accepts the award for best all-employee share plan Communications for BT Group

AWARDS



Wealth at Work's Sarah Long accepts the commendation on behalf of Jet2.

Another entry was particularly commended, as the advantages of participating in its ShareSave plan were well communicated and, though it was to a relatively small population of employees, it focused on maturity of a large gain showing meaningful quantitative impact.

Highly commended: **Jet2**



Honourable mentions

The judges wanted to mention other shortlisted entries which impressed them *almost* as much. So honourable mentions go to:

Associated British Foods: The ABF Sharesave, launched in mid-2025, was the company's first SAYE plan. The launch coincided with the mid-year results announcement, so the company had just six weeks in which to get its message across. Given this brief window, the 50 percent take-up amazed the judges, even though the plan was offered to a relatively small number of employees. It was noted too that the plan enabled junior staff members to become shareholders and benefit from any growth in ABF's share price for the first time.

Diageo: the communications of its *One World SIP*, offered to 17,000 employees eligible for the plan, resulted in participation by 80 percent of non-management employees.

easyJet: The judges looked at how easyJet communicated its *Save as You Earn*, *Performance Shares* and *Buy as You Earn* (and *UK only SIP Partnership shares*). The company is UK-centric, but with a mobile workforce. It impressed the judges that the company went to great lengths, including providing devices to employees to enable them to take part in the schemes on the move. For international employees there was a simple FX mechanism in place.



AWARDS



Category 3 – Best use of technology in employee share plans

This award category recognises innovative uses of technology to manage, communicate and administer share schemes in a fast-changing world.

The technology behind the winning company's *Saveshare Maturity* included a 'first of its kind' share plan to ISA transfer through a mobile app, plus AI-powered video guidance. It was its flexible responses to specific requests, which impressed most; and that this resulted in an 89 percent uptake by the end of the first month. Three things stood out. One was the EQ straight through ISA facility, which worked slickly, the AI-enabled video which went beyond the usual and finally the impressive microsite.

Statistics on microsite visits showed that a very high percentage of people trusted the technology.

Judges liked the message: "connect, consider, and complete".

WINNER: BT Group

BT's Anna Watch is joined by EQ's Jennifer Rudman and Sarah Long of Wealth at Work to accept the award for best use of technology in a share plan.



The judges recognised another company's share plan technology, commending the inclusion of a maturity map, videos, CGT calculator, key dates guide and choices guide, the impact of which was shown by an uptick in participation.

Highly commended: Centrica

Claire Dixon of EQ and Sarah Long of Wealth at Work accept the commendation on behalf of Centrica.



AWARDS



Category 4 – Best share plan response to significant changes or challenging situations

This award is designed to recognise ingenuity in either adapting a share plan or creating a special plan to fit the rapidly shifting landscape or help alleviate some of the pressures that arise from extraordinary situations.

When a plan issuing company was faced with acquisition, a speedy response was needed. This company used a Share Incentive Plan, to ensure its ongoing cultural commitment to share ownership. *“Despite the complexity of the transaction and the demands of early integration, the management team recognised the strategic importance of employee share ownership. The SIP had played a vital role in fostering engagement and loyalty across the issuer’s workforce, and the acquiring company was keen to preserve that culture.”*

It was this commitment, even under changed ownership, that impressed the judges.



Bryony Wilson of EQ accepts the award for best share plan response to significant changes on behalf of Carlsberg Britvic

WINNER: Carlsberg Britvic



Many congratulations to the winners, commended and all shortlisted for the 18th *newspad* All-Employee Share Plan Awards.



CoolIT employees share in \$4,75bn transaction as KKR agrees to sell

On March 25, KKR announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement to sell CoolIT Systems, a global leader in liquid data centre cooling, to Ecolab in a transaction valued at \$4.75bn. The sale will represent one of KKR's largest recent realisations, generating approximately 15x the original equity invested, inclusive of distributions.

In a press release the firm said, "With this sale, CoolIT's 650 employees will receive cash payouts, ranging from approximately one year of annual pay for employees to over eight years of annual pay. Employees will also be eligible to receive pre-paid personal financial coaching and tax preparation services.

"With the support of KKR, CoolIT delivered significant operational improvements and growth across the business, driven by a strong ownership mindset, continued product innovation, and expanded relationships with hyperscale customers. Since 2023, the company has:



- Doubled its workforce, adding more than 300 jobs
- Expanded its manufacturing footprint to more than 300,000 square feet and increased coolant distribution unit (CDU) capacity by 25x
- Positioned the business to deliver projected ~4x revenue growth and ~10x EBITDA growth through 2026.

"CoolIT demonstrates the power of a true ownership culture in driving meaningful results for both companies and employees. When employees are owners, they have a direct stake in the company's success and help drive the innovation and execution that fuel long-term growth," said Centre member Pete Stavros, partner and Global Co-Head of Private Equity at KKR. "This result reflects the team's dedication, and **every employee gets to share in the upside**".

Photo by İsmail Enes Ayhan on Unsplash



Why value sharing is essential for social justice in the workplace

Companies play a central role in either building or undermining social justice through the way they distribute the value they create. According to *The Conversation*, the decline in labour's share of national income, widening income and wealth inequality and rising poverty rates demonstrate that contemporary injustices are increasingly shaped at the corporate level rather than solely by governments or laws.

Globally, labour's share of income has fallen by 1.6 percent since 2004 to 52.3 percent in 2024, resulting in a \$2.4trn (£1.83trn) shortfall for workers in that year alone. The World Inequality Report 2026 shows the richest 10 percent capturing 53 percent of total income and holding 75 percent of global wealth, while the poorest 50 percent receive just eight percent of income and two percent of wealth. In France, the poverty rate has reached a record 15.4 percent, highlighting the erosion of social cohesion. Failing to share value exposes companies to serious risks, including social conflict, strikes, litigation, reputational damage and higher staff turnover costs — which can reach 150 percent of an annual salary for replacing disengaged employees. In contrast, value-sharing mechanisms such as profit-sharing schemes, employee stock ownership plans, skills development and wellbeing programmes can strengthen loyalty and boost productivity by 3.5 percent to five percent. Research from the United States indicates that employees nearing retirement in Esop companies hold, on average, ten times more wealth than those in comparable non-Esop firms, and these companies are three to five times less likely to lay off workers during downturns. The report argues that traditional shareholder primacy (as per Milton Friedman) is increasingly outdated, advocating instead stakeholder capitalism with greater employee representation on boards, democratic governance, and innovative ownership models like worker cooperatives (e.g. Spain's Mondragon Group) or foundation ownership (e.g. Denmark's Carlsberg). With regulations such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) increasing transparency demands, value sharing is becoming indispensable for building a fairer social contract, enhancing long-term performance and addressing inequalities **at their source within companies.**





Jersey share plans and trustees conference – May 22 2026

The Centre is returning to the Pomme d'Or in Jersey for its **employee share plans and trustees conference** on Friday **May 22**.

In a keynote speech **Tony Moretta**, ceo of **Digital Jersey**, will focus on the approach to digital technology including AI & FinTech.

A programme of talks from expert speakers to update trustees and employee share scheme professionals will include recent developments in employee share schemes and a panel debate on the progress of PISCES (Private Intermittent Securities and Capital Exchange System) including extension to the timeline.

The programme provides technical information, which we trust is acceptable as counting towards delegates' Continuing Professional Development or Continuing Competence.

Presentations will run from 09:00 to 13:15, followed by a networking lunch. The Centre is delighted that this year's event is held in conjunction with the Jersey Association of Trust Companies (JATCo) along with the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP) Jersey.



Tickets: Book early to secure discounted ticket prices:
Esop Centre/STEP/JATCo members: **£380/each**
(if booked before May 1. £450 thereafter)

Non-members: **£485/each**
(if booked before May 1. £548 thereafter)

Multi-booking discount:
50% off cost of ticket for your **third+ delegate**

To reserve your place, email us at events@esopcentre.com

Friday May 22 2026

09:00 to 14:00, Pomme d'Or Hotel, St Helier



Esop Centre/JATCo /STEP Jersey Employee Share Plans & Trustees Conference



Keynote speaker:
Tony Moretta, CEO,
Digital Jersey



David Craddock,
Founder Director,
David Craddock
Consultancy Services



Claire Matthews,
Partner,
Taylor Wessing



Graham Muir,
Consultant,
CMS



Mason Doick,
Head of Corporate,
JP Jenkins



New member: Dunderave Valuations

The Centre is delighted to welcome share valuation firm Dunderave Valuations as a new member.

Dunderave Valuations is an independent business, offering expert valuation services for tax, advisory, accounting and litigation purposes. The team combines professional expertise with real-world valuation experience to provide clear, timely and high-quality advice in a wide range of complex scenarios.

The firm's strong reputation in tax valuation is underpinned by many years' experience working alongside former HMRC SAV valuers. This provides a thorough understanding of how HMRC and other tax authorities approach valuation, and enables the team to structure its work to withstand scrutiny. Dunderave is trusted by leading private equity, legal, accounting and tax advisory firms to value all types of shares, in the context of incentive schemes, tax planning or structuring, and provides opinions for UK, European and US tax purposes.



Contacts are founder and director **Ben Macnaghten** ACA MRICS, phone +44 (0) 20 8050 4877 or +44 (0) 7789 141595.

Email ben.macnaghten@dunderavevaluations.com; and senior valuer **Hugh Whitehead** ACA. Email hugh.whitehead@dunderavevaluations.com.

Alternatively, you can send emails to enquiries@dunderavevaluations.com.

Ben Macnaghten said: *“Having been involved with the Esop Centre for some time it is a privilege to now formally join, and we look forward to collaborating with the Centre and its members to drive employee share ownership.”*



INDIA

Lloyds Engineering Works grants 81.99m Stock options

Lloyds Engineering Works Limited has announced the grant of 81,99,000 stock options to its employees and those of its subsidiary, Techno Industries Works Limited, under the Lloyds Steels Industries Limited Employee Stock Option Plan 2021. The approval was given by the Nomination and Remuneration Committee on March 31 2026. All options carry an exercise price of ₹9.50 each (£0.08).

Of the total, 69.71m options have been allocated to employees of Lloyds Engineering Works Limited, while 12.29m options go to employees of the subsidiary. If all options are exercised, the company expects to realise approximately ₹77.9m (£7.1m). The options will vest after one year but within seven years from the grant date, subject to vesting conditions, and must be exercised within three years of the respective vesting date. The grants are in line with regulatory requirements and have received approval in principle from BSE Limited and the National Stock Exchange of India. As of the grant date, no options **have been exercised, lapsed, or varied.**





SOUTH AFRICA

Old Mutual boosts employee ownership

Old Mutual has executed substantial on-market purchases of its ordinary shares through several employee trusts in South Africa and Namibia to hedge exposures arising from its Employee Share Ownership Plan and Long-term Incentive Plan awards. The transactions, which received the necessary regulatory clearance, underscore the group's ongoing commitment to broad-based black economic empowerment and employee ownership structures throughout its African operations.

The Old Mutual Limited Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Employee Trust and Old Mutual Limited Employee Trust together acquired millions of shares on the JSE, while the Old Mutual Namibia employee trusts completed additional purchases on similar terms. These dealings underpin **value creation within the group's core African markets**.

VIETNAM

F88 plans listing transfer

At its annual general meeting on March 30, Vietnamese pawnshop operator F88 approved 2026 targets including net outstanding loans of VND7.5trn (£220m), up 33 percent year-on-year, revenue of VND5.46trn (£160m), up 42 percent, and pre-tax profit of VND1.13trn (£33m), a 25 percent increase. Ceo Nguyen Duc Dai stressed balanced growth with strong risk controls, noting the pawn sector currently represents only three percent of the market, leaving substantial expansion potential supported by solid 2025 performance and new partnerships.

The company plans to grow its network from 949 to 1,000 transaction points while enhancing the My F88 app for more online transactions and improved efficiency. Shareholders approved proposals to transfer listing from UPCoM to the Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange by year-end for better liquidity, investor access and governance standards. Charter capital will rise from VND1.1trn (£32m) to approximately VND2.47trn (£72m) via a 1:1 bonus share issue, an Employee Stock Ownership Plan granting 4.4 million shares at VND10,000 (£0.29) each and a public offering of up to 22 million shares. Funds will **support subsidiary growth, subject to regulatory approval**.





USA

Esop trends and DoL's expanding role in promoting Eso

The US Department of Labor has released a report highlighting strong growth in employee stock ownership plans. While the overall number of Esop plans has remained relatively stable, the number of participants has increased by eight percent from 2014 to 2023, reaching over 15 million people across leveraged and non-leveraged Esops and KSOPs (combined Esop and 401(k) plans). Plan assets have grown even more rapidly, rising by 57 percent over the same ten-year period, with the average assets per Esop plan reaching \$314m (£240m) in 2023.



According to Forviz Mazars, this expansion is driven by several factors, including the retirement of the baby boomer generation, which creates opportunities for business owners to sell to employees rather than external buyers, increasing support for employee ownership from state governments, and growing academic interest in the model. In response, the DoL's Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) established the Division of Employee Ownership (DEO) in June 2023 under the SECURE Act 2.0's Worker Ownership, Readiness, and Knowledge (WORK) provisions. The DEO focuses on outreach and education, support for state employee ownership programmes, early-stage technical assistance and the development of an online clearinghouse of information. The initiative aims to promote and expand employee ownership across the **United States, subject to future funding.**

North Carolina court allows Esop fiduciary breach claims to proceed

According to *National Law Review* a US District Court in North Carolina has largely denied motions to dismiss ERISA claims arising from a leveraged employee stock ownership plan transaction involving Hollandia Produce Group Inc. The ruling, issued on March 3 2026, allows most fiduciary breach claims against the independent trustee, private equity investors, and transaction counsel to continue. Plaintiffs, former employees, allege that despite the Esop's claimed 100 percent ownership, it received less than \$3.1m (£2.37m) from the company's 2022 sale for \$122.5m (£93.6m), significantly diminishing plan value. The court emphasised that Esop fiduciaries cannot adopt a

passive role. It rejected the trustee's argument that it was not required to act as a "white knight" to uncover potential issues, stressing the duty to actively investigate red flags, prudently manage investments, and support participants in maximising benefits. While two claims (a malpractice claim against the trustee and a prohibited transaction claim from the 2015 Esop formation) were dismissed as time-barred, the decision underscores heightened judicial expectations for active oversight in Esop transactions. This ruling highlights increased scrutiny on independent trustees, potential liability for private equity sponsors, and greater exposure for **advisers involved in structuring such deals.**

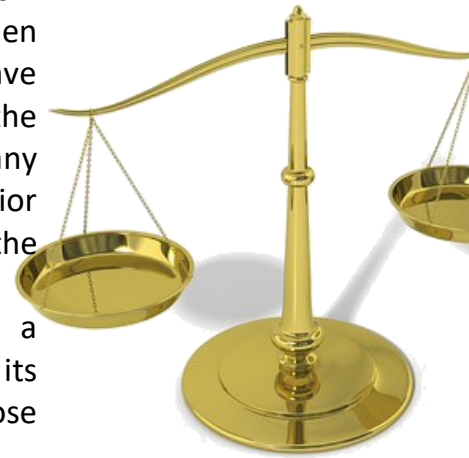


USA

Judge rules releveraging an Esop is not a fiduciary violation

The NCEO reports that many mature Esop companies use releveraging to help manage their repurchase obligations and ensure there are shares to allocate to new participants over time. Releveraging especially helps manage repurchase costs when the company's share price increases quickly. In releveraging, Esop companies borrow money to purchase shares, typically from former employees, and then allocate those shares over the life of the loan. This new debt can have a temporary impact on share value. Part of that impact is offset by the additional shares allocated to existing participants, but many companies create a floor price plan that protects at least more senior employees from a reduction in their stock value as a result of the additional debt.

Central States Manufacturing, a rapidly growing company with a mature Esop and a quickly rising stock price, chose to releverage its Esop to purchase shares from former employee participants so those shares could then be reallocated for all participants in the plan.



In *Shipp v. Central States Manufacturing, No. 5:23-CV-5215* (W.D. Ark. July 5 2024), former employees of Central States sued over the releveraging plan. The plaintiffs alleged that the releveraging was unneeded and there were other ways for the company to get shares to new employees and manage the company's ongoing repurchase obligation. The defendants argued that the employees had not shown standing because they were not harmed by the transaction and that the trustees had an obligation to act in the best interests of the plan as a whole and not just for former employees who still had accounts. The plaintiffs did not argue that releveraging per se was improper, but that the manner in which it was done was.

On March 30 2026, the judge in the same court **ruled that the releveraging was proper**, granting summary judgment. First, the judge ruled that the decision to releverage was a corporate decision appropriately made by the board of directors. The fiduciary obligation rests with the Esop trustee, GreatBanc, to make sure that the price that the Esop pays is at fair market value and that the terms of the deal are not harmful to the plan participants. Importantly, the court ruled that the trustee's obligation is to look at the interests of all of the participants in the plan and not a subset of employees whose account values might be affected because they will leave before the releveraging is complete. Since the decision is at the district level it does not create a precedent. Like any decision of this type, it is limited to the specific facts involved. If the court had ruled against releveraging, however, it could have **spurred additional lawsuits against companies that use this practice**.





USA

Torani's people-first growth strategy: No layoffs, local jobs and shared ownership

In an article for *Inc.com*, Jennifer Conrad writes that Torani, a century-old family-owned flavoured syrup company based in San Leandro, California, is growing rapidly while remaining committed to local manufacturing and its employees. Under ceo Melanie Dulbecco, who joined in 1991 when the business had just 10 employees and \$1m in annual revenue, the company has achieved average annual growth of 20 percent. In 2025, revenue reached \$650m (£497m), up approximately \$100m (£76m) from the previous year, and it is on track to hit \$1bn (£764m) by the end of the decade. Torani has never had a layoff in its history, instead focusing on upskilling and internal career development. In 2022, it introduced an Employee Stock Ownership Plan covering 10 percent of the company's equity for all staff with more than one year's service, while a private equity firm took a minority stake.



Photo by Ashleyrhianne23



The company deliberately keeps production in the San Francisco Bay Area, relocating in 2020 to a 330,000-square-foot facility that increased output by 350 percent while preserving local jobs. It plans to hire an additional 115 employees in 2026. Leadership emphasises transparency through regular town halls where financial performance and challenges are openly discussed, and every employee receives an annual bonus tied to revenue and profit growth. Dulbecco personally welcomes new hires and promotes a culture of “grow, baby grow,” encouraging internal mobility and long-term careers. Torani keeps up to date with beverage trends while expanding into retail and supporting drive-through drink shops. At the same time it maintains its family-controlled majority **stake and people-first approach**.



‘The UK’s impact economy definition must put ownership first’

Peter Holbrook, group ceo of the Social Enterprise Coalition, argues that the recently valued £428bn ‘impact economy’ — equivalent to around 15 percent of UK GDP — should not be allowed to default to investor-friendly models that risk widening inequality. In an opinion piece published on March 23, he warns that without placing ownership at the centre of the definition, the government’s new Office for the Impact Economy could inadvertently prioritise conventional private firms and impact investors over truly mission-locked organisations. While purpose-driven businesses such as B Corps demonstrate ethical behaviour, they remain legally bound by shareholder primacy under UK company law. In contrast, social enterprises, cooperatives, mutuals and employee-owned firms embed social mission directly into their ownership structures, generating an estimated £78bn in turnover and supporting 2.3 million jobs.

Holbrook urges the Office for the Impact Economy to take five practical steps: broaden the official definition to specify cooperatives, mutuals and employee-owned businesses; measure not just gross value added but also how wealth is distributed through pay ratios, profit sharing, community reinvestment and local procurement; prioritise democratically-owned models for public contracts and finance; develop patient, mission-aligned capital instruments such as regional social investment funds and social-purpose REITs; and embed ownership tests into procurement to favour models that keep wealth local. He highlights the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Act 2026 as a useful example. Holbrook concludes that true economic renewal requires moving beyond rebranding private capital and instead supporting ownership models that root prosperity in communities, reduce **inequality and deliver genuine shared benefit**.





Bank of England warns of ‘large and overlapping’ shocks to UK economy

The Bank of England has warned that the UK financial system faces growing risks of “large, frequent and potentially overlapping shocks” owing to the conflict in the Middle East and its impact on energy and global markets. In its latest Financial Policy Committee meeting, officials noted that the war is likely to weigh on economic growth, push up inflation, and tighten financial conditions, while interacting with existing vulnerabilities. Around 1.3 million additional UK households could see higher mortgage costs, as banks have already withdrawn about 1,500 mortgage products and raised rates on others amid heightened uncertainty.

The Bank highlighted other risks including “stretched” valuations in artificial intelligence stocks and vulnerabilities in risky credit markets, particularly private credit. It described the global environment as materially more unpredictable, increasing the likelihood of intense market volatility. Domestically, the economic outlook has deteriorated, adding pressure on households and businesses. This comes as the energy price cap is set to rise by 18 percent after June, with analysts warning that high energy prices could persist even if the conflict eases quickly. The Bank also reiterated concerns over compressed risk premia in equity and debt markets, which could **lead to sharp corrections if conditions worsen.**

UK economy grew 1.4 percent in 2025 amid slowing momentum

The UK economy expanded by 1.4 percent in 2025, according to revised official data from the Office for National Statistics, slightly higher than the previous estimate of 1.3 percent. Growth was strongest in the first quarter at 0.7 percent but slowed sharply thereafter, with GDP rising by just 0.2 percent in the second quarter, 0.1 percent in the third, and 0.1 percent in the fourth. GDP per capita increased by 1.1 percent over the year but fell by 0.1 percent in the final quarter. Business investment rose two percent annually, though it dropped 2.5 percent in the fourth quarter, while real household disposable income grew by 1.2 percent in the last quarter, supported by higher wages.

Economists described the picture as one of stagnation, with momentum fading owing to tax changes, cautious households and heightened geopolitical risks from the Middle East conflict. The International Monetary Fund noted the UK is “especially exposed” to higher gas prices and analysts have revised down 2026 forecasts, with some warning of a possible mild recession. Energy prices have surged, with UK gas prices up more than 70 percent and Brent Crude exceeding \$115 (£88) per barrel. The government maintains it has the right plan, highlighting the UK as the fastest-growing G7 European economy last year and pointing to regional growth, AI and closer EU ties to support recovery. However, the conflict threatens to push energy costs **higher and dampen growth further.**



American Express ceo pay reflects performance-linked model

According to filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, Stephen J Squeri, chairman and ceo of American Express, is set to receive total compensation of \$46.2m for 2025. The package follows a familiar structure for large US corporates, combining base salary, annual bonuses and long-term incentive plans. Importantly, the company emphasises that pay is tightly linked to performance—both financial and strategic. Metrics considered include shareholder returns, business growth and progress against long-term objectives. Under Squeri's leadership, American Express has continued to expand its premium customer base and strengthen its position in high-value segments such as travel and entertainment. The company has pushed forward its digital transformation strategy, contributing both to steady stock performance and investor returns over the past year. A notable feature of the compensation framework is the inclusion of environmental, social and governance criteria. This reflects a broader shift across large corporations, where executive remuneration is increasingly tied not just to financial outcomes but also to sustainability and governance targets. Overall, the package illustrates a wider trend seen across recent examples—from UK banks to global pharma—where rising executive pay is justified by strong corporate performance, but continues to attract scrutiny over alignment **with broader stakeholder interests**.





Employee salaries at major South Korean firms exceed 100 million won

The average annual salary for employees at major South Korean large corporations surpassed 100m won (£50,000) for the first time last year, rising 5.2 percent from the previous year to 100.28m won (£50,140), according to a survey of 211 companies among the top 500 by sales. In contrast, the average remuneration for the highest-paid executives increased more steeply by 7.6 percent to 2.18bn won (£1.09m), widening the pay gap from 20.7 times to 21.2 times. The widest pay gaps appeared in the distribution sector (39.3 times), followed by food and beverage, holding companies, and IT/electronics. The financial sector showed a narrower gap. Notable examples include HS Hyosung with a 158.4-fold difference, while the highest individual executive compensations reached up to 24.84bn won (£12.42m). Employee pay was highest in securities firms, exceeding 180m won (£90,000) at several companies. Analysts noted that while employee pay rose with better corporate performance, executive increases were larger, **further widening the disparity.**

Kwek Leng Beng receives S\$7.4m remuneration from CDL in 2025

Singapore's second-richest billionaire and City Developments executive chairman Kwek Leng Beng received S\$7.4m (£4.34m) in total remuneration for 2025, a 24.3 percent increase from the previous year. The package included S\$1.5m in fixed salary, S\$5.6m in bonuses, plus board fees and benefits. This came as CDL's full-year profit tripled to S\$629.7m, driven by record residential sales and significant asset divestments.

His son and group ceo Sherman Kwek was paid S\$5.1m (£2.99m), up 70.8 percent year-on-year, including a deferred long-term incentive. The higher executive pay followed a strong performance year that helped restore confidence after a public family boardroom dispute earlier in 2025. The Kwek family ranked second on Forbes' Singapore richest list with **a net worth of US\$14.3bn (£10.8bn).**



Meta unveils ambitious exec compensation plan targeting \$9trn valuation

Meta Platforms has announced a bold executive compensation programme that could award up to \$2.7bn (£2.06bn) in stock options and restricted stock units (RSUs) to six top executives, excluding ceo Mark Zuckerberg. The plan, detailed in an SEC filing, is designed to align leadership incentives with aggressive growth targets, aiming to drive the company's market capitalisation from around \$1.5trn to \$9trn (£6.88trn) by 2031. Key beneficiaries include cto Andrew Bosworth, cfo Susan Li, coo Javier Olivan, and cpo Chris Cox. The structure combines time-vesting RSUs with performance-based stock options that only deliver significant value if Meta achieves substantial stock price appreciation, primarily through AI-driven innovation.

The package has drawn comparisons with Elon Musk's Tesla compensation plan but features a shorter timeline and excludes the ceo, reflecting Zuckerberg's existing large shareholding. Supporters view it as a necessary tool in the fierce talent war for AI expertise, helping Meta retain senior leaders amid intense competition from companies such as Google and OpenAI. Critics, however, have highlighted concerns over potential shareholder dilution, the contrast with recent layoffs to fund AI investments, and the risk of perpetuating income inequality. The plan has also raised questions about regulatory scrutiny, corporate governance, and whether such high-stakes incentives could encourage excessive risk-taking in **pursuit of unprecedented valuation growth**.



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The gravy train economics of ceo pay in South Africa

Currency magazine claims that South African ceos receive extraordinarily high pay packages despite weak links to actual company performance. Recent examples include incoming Woolworths ceo Sam Ngumeni's R100m (£4.3m) long-term incentive and Old Mutual's new boss Jurie Strydom, who could earn up to R300m (£12.9m) if targets are met. These packages typically rely on complex long-term incentive plans involving large numbers of shares that vest upon hitting financial or share-price goals. However, a Labour Research Service study of 65 JSE-listed companies found that in two-thirds of cases, ceo pay rose while profits fell. Notable examples include Sasol, Telkom and Cashbuild, where executive rewards increased even as company profits declined.

Critics argue that the common justifications — scarce talent, global benchmarking and performance alignment — do not hold up. Boards often chase international executives with inflated packages, yet many such hires have underperformed, while companies fail to develop internal talent pipelines. The “ratchet effect” of benchmarking against peers drives ever-higher pay, and targets are frequently set too easy, leading to guaranteed vesting. Remuneration committees, often advised by consultants who serve management, and non-executive directors who benefit from generous fees, show limited resolve to challenge executives. Shareholder votes on pay policies remain non-binding and are routinely ignored, as seen with The Foschini Group and Spar. Experts call for binding votes, greater transparency on pay ratios, simpler remuneration policies, and more active shareholding to curb the upward spiral and better align executive rewards with genuine long-term value **creation for shareholders and society.**

