



Pictured after the talk, from left, Professor Richard Bolden, professor of leadership and management, UWE Bristol; Paul Goddard, CMI; Donna Whitehead, pro vice-chancellor and executive dean, UWE Bristol; Richard Gleave; student Deborah Smith; and Professor Nicholas O'Regan, associate dean (research & innovation)

## Thomas Cook sees big drop in UK earnings

Travel giant Thomas Cook has revealed a 40 per cent plunge in UK earnings amid “challenging” trading and a hit from the weak pound.

The holiday giant reported underlying earnings of £52 million for the UK division in the year to September 30, down from £86 million the previous year, after it was knocked by rising hotel prices, the pound and fierce competition in the Spanish market.

It also said its costs were sent surging after facing a torrent of fraudulent illness claims and after supporting 10,000 customers caught up in Hurricane Irma. Shares in the group plunged as much as 13 per cent after the results.

But the group said it had launched action to return its UK division to profitable growth once more by slashing costs, taking legal action against illness fraudsters and focusing on fast-growing hol-

Peter Fankhauser says action has been taken to improve performance



iday destinations Turkey and Egypt as demand returned to the countries.

The wider group enjoyed a better year, with pre-tax profits rising to £46 million from £34 million a year earlier, thanks to a turnaround at its German airline Condor and improved customer demand.

Underlying earnings rose £24 million to £330 million.

Peter Fankhauser, chief executive of Thomas Cook, said: “2017 was a milestone year in the strategic development of Thomas Cook.”

“Looking to the year ahead, we can see real momentum in our group airline and expect our continental Europe and northern Europe tour operator businesses to continue their good performance.”

“While conditions are challenging in the UK, we have implemented a set of actions to improve performance.”

## Crossrail staff in strike vote

Workers on the Crossrail project are to be balloted for industrial action in a dispute over pay.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union working as train controllers on the multi-billion-pound cross-London rail scheme will vote in the coming weeks.

The union said the workers had learned their pay was around half that of other grades.

Mick Cash, RMT general secretary, said: “RMT will not tolerate a situation where members working on the prestigious and expensive Crossrail operation are getting a raw deal on pay compared to other grades.”

# Health chief rising to the challenge

BY ANNIE RICHARDS  
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The timing could have been better for Richard Gleave, the deputy chief executive and chief operating officer of Public Health England, when he addressed an audience in Bristol last Wednesday.

That very day a leading NHS blogger called for a series of changes to improve the NHS, including the breaking up of Public Health England.

But if PHE was not creating controversy, then it was not doing its job properly, said Mr Gleave. “Because addressing the key issues around public health is not a place where you want to be comfortable. It is a place where you want challenges.”

The role of PHE was much misunderstood, he said. It was

not a provider nor a funder of care services, it was not a regulator, it was not a Whitehall department nor a university. Its job was to help people to live well and for a long time – frequently straddling the demands of the local, the practical and Whitehall.

## 95%

How much safer are e-cigarettes compared with smoking tobacco

There are big threats out there, he said, not least a flu pandemic. “It will come at some stage,” he said.

PHE, he added, was an evidence informed institution that

examined issues of public interest, frequently getting drawn into areas of controversy. For example, the Government had no policy on e-cigarettes but PHE stepped into the space because it was an issue of public interest – stating e-cigarettes were 95 per cent safer than smoking tobacco-based products.

He asked: “Would it be the right thing to remain silent?”

Similarly, PHE has been drawn into the debate around the safety of fridges following the Grenfell Tower fire disaster and the threat posed by sugar in a country that has the biggest problem with obesity in western Europe.

But the latter proved a harsh lesson in realpolitik for PHE when the Chancellor announced a sugar tax.

“It was a bit of a surprise,”



Public Health England's Richard Gleave says he is motivated by 'creating futures that are as yet unseen'

said Mr Gleave. “We thought we were heading for a childhood obesity plan and this came along.”

Not all the advice put forward by PHE gets adopted, but Mr Gleave said he remained an optimist at heart.

“What we can do in PHE is have a seat around the table in the rooms that are closed and that don't get seen,” he said. “I welcome people commenting and making statements and lots of the media coverage, but that needs to be complemented by the difficult discussions and the harsh realities of political life. That's what motivates me.”

“Bringing the optimism into those conversations, creating futures that are as yet unseen – that are what we really care about – that is what motivates me.”

## Sofa firm reports rise in orders despite ‘continued uncertainty’

Sofa chain ScS has seen orders bounce back after a slump in the second half of its last financial year and assured it was well-positioned to weather “continued economic uncertainty”.

The group said like-for-like orders rose 2.9 per cent in the 16 weeks to November 18,

while two-year like-for-like orders jumped eight per cent.

When accounting for its core business alone, orders rose 3.6 per cent for the period, with that number rising to 7.9 per cent for two-year orders, both on a like-for-like basis.

The order figures mark an improvement on the half-year

trading statement released in August, having reported a five per cent slump in second-half orders after being hit by more difficult retail conditions and failing to match up to strong sales a year earlier.

However, the performance of its House of Fraser concessions – which made up 6.2

per cent of its orders over the 16-week period – suffered, with orders down 6.4 per cent.

ScS, which made the update as it holds its annual meeting for shareholders, said the drop was due to “very strong” comparative figures in the same period a year earlier.

On a two-year measure, like-

for-like concession orders were up 10 per cent.

Chairman Alan Smith said he was “pleased to report” that ScS had made a good start to the financial year. He added: “Whilst it is still early in the current financial year, the group continues to trade in line with our expectations.”