

[Press release: James Brokenshire launches £200 million pilot to boost social home ownership](#)

Thousands of social housing association tenants are being given the opportunity to realise their dream of home ownership, as the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot launches today (16 August 2018).

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said this is the first step in helping housing association tenants get a foot on the property ladder.

This follows measures announced in this week's [social housing green paper](#), to make it easier for residents to progress into home ownership. The existing Right to Buy programme for council tenants backs families who have worked hard, paid their rent and have a sense of pride in their home.

Government is providing £200 million for this Voluntary Right to Buy pilot, with places allocated via a ballot to ensure fairness for applicants.

After working closely with the National Housing Federation to make this launch a reality, money from the discounted sales will then be used to fund replacement homes.

Speaking at the launch, Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

This government is committed to providing opportunities for people to get a foot on the property ladder and to have a place they can call their own.

Our £200 million investment into the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot is the first step in helping housing association tenants realise their dream of home ownership.

Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation David Orr said:

Over the past 3 years, we have worked closely with the government on its proposal to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Of course, this pilot is not the finished product. We want to take the time to get this major endeavour right.

It will be a success for everyone involved only if every home that is sold is replaced with a new affordable home, and if the application process is as smooth as possible for tenants.

Now, we are looking forward to working with tenants, with housing

associations and with the government to make this pilot a resounding success. This scheme must empower social housing tenants and meet our own ambitions to deliver the homes the country needs.

This is the latest step by government to make the housing market work, with opportunities available to realise the dream of home ownership whether you rent in the private or social sectors. Council housing tenants are already able to buy their home at a discount and since 2010 Right to Buy has helped almost 94,000 households

Earlier in June, a £1.67 billion government grant was announced from the £9 billion Affordable Homes programme that will deliver 23,000 new affordable homes, including 12,500 for social rent.

Places will be allocated via a ballot to ensure fairness and manage interest within the funding available. The ballot will close a month from today's launch (16 September 2018), with the pilot running until spring 2020 giving successful candidates adequate time to complete the purchase.

The government will assess the impact of the pilot before deciding on the next steps for this policy.

The [National Housing Federation \(NHF\)](#) is a trade association, which represents social landlords and housing associations in England.

Since 2010 we have delivered over 378,000 new affordable homes through our £9 billion Affordable Homes Programme.

£200 million of government funding is being provided for the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy pilot, as announced in the 2017 Autumn Budget.

The government will fully fund the discounts, and housing associations will use the receipts from the sales to fund replacement homes.

Registration website for the [Voluntary Right To Buy pilot](#).

Since 2010 Right to Buy has helped almost 94,000 households get onto the housing ladder.

We are using a ballot because we believe this is the fairest way of managing interest within the funding available to the pilot project. The alternative would have been to allocate spaces on a first come, first served basis. This would have disadvantaged residents with accessibility issues, or those who could not get onto the internet in the first few days of opening.

The ballot will be open for a period of one month, after which no further registrations will be accepted. Shortly after the ballot has closed, the ballot will randomly allocate places on the pilot.

Tenants who are successful in the ballot will not be guaranteed that they can purchase under the scheme – they will still need to meet the eligibility criteria and complete the application process in full.

Housing associations will have discretion over which properties they sell. Where the home is exempt from the pilot, the housing association will give the tenant the opportunity to use their Right to Buy discount to buy another housing association property. This is known as the portable discount, and is being tested through the pilot.

A list of participating housing associations and local authorities is available on request.

Press release: UK response to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu, DRC

UK response to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu, DRC

The UK is working closely with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other partners to tackle the latest outbreak of Ebola in the country.

The UK is providing expertise and support to help the government and WHO respond effectively to this outbreak which is occurring in a very insecure region. This response is enabling faster diagnosis and monitoring of the spread of the disease, and is improving medical facilities and their capacity to treat patients. It will also protect health workers and raise awareness of the disease within local communities.

In addition, we are supporting the WHO to strengthen surveillance at borders and help neighbouring areas to prepare to tackle the disease should it spread.

Yesterday (15th August 2018) the International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt spoke with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the WHO, to discuss Dr Tedros's reflections on his recent visit to the area and how the UK can continue to support the current response.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

“Global health threats like Ebola devastate lives and don't respect borders. The UK is acting now to support the DRC Government, WHO and other partners to contain this latest outbreak occurring in a very challenging context.

“We've also already been working extensively with these partners to improve vulnerable countries' capacity to detect and tackle outbreaks like this quickly when they occur – to maintain stability in the region and keep the UK public safe at home.”

The UK is supporting WHO and partners to strengthen health systems so that

African countries at high risk of disease outbreaks such as the DRC have the capability to prevent, detect and respond quickly to new outbreaks. This work was proven to be effective in the swift response which tackled the previous Ebola outbreak this year in Equator Province of the DRC.

The UK is also the leading donor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and the second largest contributor to the WHO Contingency Fund for Emergencies, both of which have mobilised to tackle this outbreak.

Following the West Africa outbreak of Ebola in 2014, UK aid worked with the Wellcome Trust to develop an experimental vaccine for the disease. UK aid support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has helped ensure a stockpile of this vaccine is available. A vaccination programme to protect high risk populations in North Kivu province has now been launched. Risk to the UK from this outbreak remains negligible to very low, but Public Health England continues to monitor the situation closely.

[News story: UK armoured vehicles arrive in Oman ahead of Exercise Saif Sareea 3](#)

Saif Sareea 3 (SS3) is the third UK-Oman joint exercise, with the previous two taking place in 1986 and 2001. SS3 is the UK Armed Forces lead exercise this year and the largest joint exercise of its kind in 17 years.

The exercise, culminating in a 'firepower demonstration', will test the UK and Sultanate's ability to operate together in austere conditions through the deployment of a Coalition Joint Task Force.

A Scimitar CVRT (combat vehicle reconnaissance tracked), used for reconnaissance, disembarks from the UK 'RoRo' ship in Duqm. © MOD Crown Copyright

The shipping of the equipment for the exercise is coordinated and delivered by Joint Forces Command (JFC), who will coordinate sea and air transportation (often heading to the new Joint Logistics Support Base) prior to and following the exercise.

The equipment being transported to Oman will be crucial to the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marine activity during the exercise.

The two RORO ships which arrived this week in Duqm left the military port in Marchwood, near Southampton, in late July. The ships sailed into the Port of Duqm on the 10 and 14 August, each with a cargo of over 3,500 tonnes. Their cargo included vehicles such as Warrior armoured fighting vehicles, Scimitar

CVRT (combat vehicle reconnaissance tracked) and Bulldog personnel carriers.

Challenger Armoured Repair and Recovery Vehicle being transported from the port to the Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm. © MOD Crown Copyright

Troops of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, laboured in the heat of the morning to unload vehicles and containers. Corporal Jennifer MacPhee-Peace (32), a Port Operator said:

Because it's so hot, you just want to get it done with, we unlashd everything within an hour.

Over 200 vehicles were unloaded from the ship, belonging to 1 Mercian, 22 Royal Engineers, Royal Tank Regiment, 40 Commando Royal Marines and the Commando Helicopter Force.

The vehicles and other logistical equipment will be transported onwards to the Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm and other locations ahead of the start of the exercise in October.

[News story: Guide to AS and A level results for England, 2018](#)

Key points

1. Overall results in England are stable for reformed and unreformed A levels and standards have been maintained. It is important not to over-interpret relatively small changes in year-on-year results.
2. Entries for reformed AS qualifications in England have dropped which makes it much more difficult to compare year-on-year results.
3. The variability in results within centres is similar to previous years showing that schools and colleges have responded well to the reforms. Even when there are no changes to qualifications, individual schools and colleges will see variation in their year-on-year results; this is normal.

Today (16 August 2018) we are publishing:

You may also find it useful to read about [how we regulate GCSEs, AS and A levels in England](#).

An historical perspective...

The exam boards use the principle of comparable outcomes when awarding, as a way of ensuring that standards are maintained.

The principle of comparable outcomes is not new. It has always been used by exam boards, particularly when qualifications change. It's a principle that exam boards have followed for decades: that if the ability of the cohort of students is similar to previous years, they would expect results (outcomes) to be similar. This means that, in general, students who would have achieved a grade A in one year would achieve a grade A in another year.

The phrase 'comparable outcomes' has also come to mean awarding based on statistical predictions, because that's the way we and the exam boards put that principle into practice. Predictions give us a way to maintain standards, and a mechanism to make sure exam boards' standards are aligned, so that it is no easier to get a grade with one than with another. But predictions are not used in isolation. Senior examiners review the work of students at the key grade boundaries to make sure it is appropriate for the grade. Where they judge that it is not, they can move the boundary to a mark where they are satisfied that the standard of work is appropriate.

Since 2010 we have required exam boards to report their results to us against predictions and to provide a rationale where they are not in line. Results in recent years have been stable year-on-year (see [infographic](#)).

Setting standards in AS and A levels in 2018

As in previous years, the approach outlined above has been used for all AS and A levels in 2018 – reformed and unreformed. It is particularly important at times of change, as it protects students from being disadvantaged because they are the first to sit new qualifications, when teachers do not have access to the same bank of resources and past papers. We have been clear since before students embarked on these new courses that the exam boards would use predictions to carry forward the standards to these new AS and A levels.

In the 2018 AS and A level awards, exam boards used predictions based on the students' prior attainment at GCSE. And, as in previous years, senior examiners have reviewed students' work in all awards. In the reformed A levels this year they were asked to check whether student work at the grade boundaries suggested by the statistics was acceptable for the grade (either A or E). And, in some of these awards, the senior examiners recommended grade boundaries that deviated from those suggested by the statistical evidence. We have not intervened to ask any boards to change their grade boundaries this summer.

Reformed A level subjects in 2018

This summer, reformed A levels were awarded for the first time in 12 more subjects, including A level mathematics, that was available after one year of

study. This was to facilitate students entering A level mathematics after one year of study and A level further mathematics the following year, a continuation of the approach taken by some students prior to reform. The majority of the entries for A level mathematics this summer are for the legacy specifications.

The content of the new A levels has been refreshed and updated, with greater input from universities, and the assessment requirements have changed in some subjects (to reflect changes in the proportion of non-exam assessment). The new A levels are linear qualifications, but overall A levels have not been made more demanding.

We have been clear that exam boards would maintain standards from the legacy versions of the qualifications, so that in general, students who would have achieved a grade A in previous years would achieve a grade A this year.

Average number of A level qualifications per student

JCQ published data presents the numbers of entries and certifications, rather than data at student level. This is because students typically take AS and A levels with more than one exam board. It is also worth noting that many students also take AS or A levels alongside other qualifications, which we have not included in this analysis. We have combined the exam board data to look at the average number of A levels per student for 18-year-olds in England taking at least one A level each year (students generally complete their A levels aged 18). This is shown in the table below. For A level, the average number has remained stable since 2015.

Average number of A level qualifications per student (18-year-olds in England)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
A level	2.71	2.68	2.67	2.68

Grade boundaries

It is difficult to compare in a meaningful way grade boundaries between reformed and legacy qualifications, for several reasons. Maximum marks for the papers differ, the number of papers in a subject differs, and the type of assessment can be different. It is particularly difficult to compare reformed grade boundaries with the legacy qualifications where there was a significant amount of non-exam assessment, or where the proportion of non-exam assessment has changed, since the grade boundaries on written papers may have been higher to compensate for high performance on the coursework. This makes it difficult to make comparisons for the majority of reformed A level qualifications awarded for the first time this summer, since many contain some non-exam assessment. We have therefore only compared grade boundaries with last summer for reformed A level qualifications first awarded in summer

2017, since for these qualifications we are able to compare like-with-like.

The following table shows a summary of the changes in paper level grade boundaries for these qualifications compared to summer 2017. Although exam papers are intended to be of the same demand as previous years, in practice, this is very difficult to achieve, so grade boundaries change to take account of the demand of the papers.

Overall, the grade boundaries for individual papers are relatively stable compared to last summer. At both grades A and E, a similar number of grade boundaries have increased as have decreased. On average, the grade boundaries at grade A have changed by around a quarter of a raw mark, and the grade boundaries at grade E have changed by less than a quarter of a raw mark.

Changes in paper grade boundaries for reformed A levels first awarded in summer 2017

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Average mark change
Grade A 118	95		124	-0.25
Grade E 110	136		91	-0.18

Reformed AS qualifications

This summer is the third year that reformed AS qualifications have been awarded. These are standalone qualifications in England that no longer count towards the A level. Students therefore do not have to take the AS qualification if they are intending to certificate at A level.

AS entries for reformed qualifications have declined sharply this summer, as outlined in the provisional entries report that we published earlier this year. This means that entries to some AS subjects are now relatively small. Due to the decline in entries, we have not published centre variability graphs for AS qualifications this year, since many subjects do not have sufficient entries to make valid comparisons. Where the cohorts are small and changing year on year, the outcomes may inevitably be more variable.

Instead, we have analysed the number of 17-year-old students taking at least one AS qualification in 2018 compared to previous years. This is shown in the table below. The number of students taking at least one AS qualification has declined significantly since 2017, following a smaller decline between 2016 and 2017. Because of this decline we have not calculated the average number of AS qualifications taken per student this year, since significantly fewer 17-year-olds took any AS qualifications compared to last summer.

Number of students taking at least one AS qualification (17-year-olds in England)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
AS	281,600	270,500	209,540	64,810

Notice: Laing O'Rourke Construction Limited: application made to abstract water

The Environment Agency consult the public on certain applications for the abstraction and impoundment of water.

These notices explain:

- what the application is about
- which Environment Agency offices you can visit to see the application documents on the public register
- when you need to comment by