

Press release: PM to give speech on education to mark launch of post-18 education and funding review

- PM to warn against “outdated attitude” that favours academic over technical qualifications
- new education review will break down “false boundaries” to look at whole post-18 system
- review to identify ways to help young people make more effective choices when they leave school
- PM will acknowledge concerns with the current funding system and pledge to make it fairer
- speech will set out PM’s vision for an education system that truly serves the needs of every child

Theresa May will urge people to “throw away” the “outdated attitude” that university is the only desirable route for young people and that going into vocational training “is something for other people’s children”.

In a speech in Derbyshire to launch a wide-ranging review into post-18 education, the Prime Minister will call for a parity of esteem between academic and technical options so we can “create a system of tertiary education that works for all our young people”.

She will say that “means equality of access to an academic university education which is not dependent on your background, and it means a much greater focus on the technical alternatives too.”

The government-led review – supported by an independent, external chair and panel – will identify ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18.

This could include giving young people better guidance about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures.

For those who retrain during their career, the review will also look at how to support flexible life-long learning, including part-time and distance learning.

The PM will pledge to use the review to look at “the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, so we can create a system which is truly joined up.”

She is expected to warn that while significant progress in education reform over recent years has succeeded in driving up school standards and improving the choice and quality of technical education, the current post-18 system is not working as well as it could be – for young people or for the country.

The Prime Minister will continue: "For those young people who do not go on to academic study, the routes into further technical and vocational training today are hard to navigate, the standards across the sector are too varied and the funding available to support them is patchy.

So now is the time to take action to create a system that is flexible enough to ensure that everyone gets the education that suits them.

There are now record numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university, and the government is determined to build on this progress.

The Prime Minister will say today: "One of the great social achievements of the last half-century has been the transformation of an academic university education from something enjoyed almost-exclusively by a social elite into something which is open to everyone."

She will set out her commitment to continuing to ensure "that people from all backgrounds share the benefit of university study."

On the question of student finance, the Prime Minister will acknowledge that many young people, their parents and grandparents, have serious concerns – which she shares – about aspects of the current system.

She will confirm that the review will examine the whole system of student funding – including how it provides value for money, both for students and taxpayers, and how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies.

She will say: "The competitive market between universities which the system of variable tuition fees envisaged has simply not emerged. All but a handful of universities charge the maximum possible fees for undergraduate courses. Three-year courses remain the norm. And the level of fees charged do not relate to the cost or quality of the course. We now have one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world."

She will also note that the goal of making university truly accessible to young people from every background "is not made easier by a funding system which leaves students from the lowest-income households bearing the highest levels of debt, with many graduates left questioning the return they get for their investment."

And she will say that the review "will examine how we can give people from disadvantaged backgrounds an equal chance to succeed. That includes how disadvantaged students and learners receive maintenance support, both from government and universities and colleges."

Recalling her maiden speech in Parliament in 1997, in which she set out her belief that the aim of education policy should be to "provide the right education for every child", the Prime Minister will use today's speech to

restate her long-held view that “education is the key to opening up opportunity for everyone.”

And she will say that, by building an education system which unlocks everyone’s talents, “we can build a country that truly does work for everyone.

She will add: “A country where your background does not define your future, and class distinctions are a thing of the past. Where a boy from a working-class home can become a High Court judge, thanks to a great state education. And where a girl from a private school can start a software business, thanks to a first-class technical education.

That is my vision for a fairer society and how we will deliver it. A society where good, rewarding work is available for everyone. An economy with the skills it needs to succeed.

Britain as the Great Meritocracy, a country that respects hard work, rewards effort and industry, where a happy and fulfilled life is within everyone’s grasp.

The panel’s report will be published at an interim stage and the review will conclude in early 2019.

Press release: PM call with the President of South Africa: 18 February 2018

The Prime Minister called President Cyril Ramaphosa this afternoon to congratulate him on his recent appointment.

Ramaphosa welcomed the call which followed their short discussion at the World Economic Forum, and the Prime Minister extended an invitation for him to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April.

President Ramaphosa confirmed that he looked forward to attending and using the opportunity to discuss deepening the UK-South Africa relationship, including by building on trade ties and working together on South Africa’s transformation agenda.

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Press release: Church spires to boost digital connectivity in rural areas

The [accord](#) (PDF, 74.9KB, 3 pages) , signed by the the National Church Institutions (NCIs) of the Church of England, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) encourages the Church of England to use its buildings and other property to improve broadband, mobile and WiFi connectivity for local communities.

65% of Anglican churches and 66% of parishes in England are in rural areas and their locations at the heart of their communities mean they are often well placed to address connectivity and coverage problems.

The use of these churches, as well as other church properties and farm buildings, to host digital infrastructure will help to deliver the Government's commitment for everyone to get good quality mobile connectivity where they live, work and travel.

DCMS Secretary of State, Matt Hancock said:

Churches are central features and valued assets for local communities up and down the country. This agreement with the Church of England will mean that even a 15th century building can help make Britain fit for the future improving people's lives by

boosting connectivity in some of our hardest-to-reach areas.

Through its Industrial Strategy, the Government is continually driving the UK's connectivity, telecommunications and digital sectors, and investing in the skills, industries and infrastructure of the future.

Improved digital connectivity will bring a range of benefits to rural communities, including:

- better access to online public services
- improved social interaction with family and friends
- effective online presence meaning that local businesses can extend their reach and better compete with other
- businesses, or in the case of tourism businesses, better attract visitors to the local area
- better access to skills and training which can lead to further local employment opportunities that deliver
- improved productivity and can boost the wider local economy.

The Dioceses of Chelmsford and Norwich are already supporting programmes which use Church buildings to improve connectivity in rural areas. It is hoped the accord will be instrumental in encouraging more local dioceses and parishes to positively consider how they can use their property in this way.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell, said:

We know that rural churches in particular have always served as a hub for their communities. Encouraging churches to improve connectivity will help tackle two of the biggest issues rural areas face – isolation and sustainability.

The Diocese of Chelmsford has been pioneering this approach with County Broadband since 2013. Our work has significantly improved rural access to high-speed broadband.

Many new forms of technology are available to improve internet access in rural areas and I hope that this partnership between the Church of England and the Government will help rural churches consider how they can be part of the solution. I know that many churches already help people access the internet and provide digital skills training, and this Accord is a natural extension of great work already occurring.

The Bishop of Norwich, Rt Revd Graham James, said:

I welcome this agreement. It builds on what we have been seeking to do in the Diocese of Norwich since 2011 with the creation of WiSpire, a company seeking to use church towers and spires to enable Wifi connectivity in communities, especially in rural

locations.

Our parish churches are a truly national network, and to use them creatively to create new forms of connectivity enhances their value for the communities they serve.

Hamish Macleod, Director Mobile UK, said:

Mobile UK welcomes this announcement from Government and the Church of England, which emphasises the benefits of mobile connectivity to local communities.

Where there is a need, a suitable building is available and appropriate terms can be agreed, the mobile operators will continue to extend their use of churches to increase mobile coverage and capacity, while respecting the church environment.

Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner said:

It is vitally important people living in the countryside have the same opportunities as those in urban areas, and that means having strong mobile and broadband infrastructures in place.

This initiative marks an important step in our continued drive to connect better our rural communities and bridge the digital divide.

Clear guidance set out by both the Church and Historic England ensures that any telecoms infrastructure deployed does not impact on the character and architectural or historic significance of churches.

Under the accord the Government has also pledged to provide advice for parishes and dioceses to enable them to consider supporting digital connectivity and to develop the necessary skills for digital infrastructure projects.

There is the possibility that similar accords could be made with other faith communities that have similar estates.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Owing to varying terrain and different community needs the Accord covers all types of mobile and broadband technologies – churches are free to explore different options to meet the needs of their communities.

There are more than 120 cases of broadband and mobile services being delivered from parish churches across the country. These take a number of forms – from wireless transmitters in church spires and church towers, to

aerials, satellite dishes, and more traditional fibre cables. The Church of England has just over 16,000 church buildings in 12,500 parishes.

[Church of England](#) and [Historic England](#) guidance on the installation of telecoms equipment in churches

At a round table meeting with rural Church of England Bishops, convened by the Bishop of St Albans, Rt Rev Alan Smith, and representatives of the fixed and mobile operators on 13 December 2017, chaired by the then Minister for Digital, Matt Hancock, and the Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, Lord Gardiner, it was agreed that an accord between the Church and Government would help make clear the importance of connectivity and support in principle for using Church assets to host fibre and mobile infrastructure.

Joint [accord](#) (PDF, 74.9KB, 3 pages) on Use of Church Land and Buildings to Support Digital Connectivity

[News story: The visit of Lord Astor of Hever to Oman](#)

Lord Astor of Hever, the UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy visited Oman on 11 – 15 February 2018. His role is to work with the UK Department for International Trade to support and encourage the growth of business links and partnerships between the UK and Oman, and to promote the UK as a trade partner of choice for Oman. His visit reinforced the importance the UK places on its bilateral trade relationship with Oman.

During his visit, Lord Astor had meetings with a range of senior government and business officials. He had a series of key meetings with senior officials to discuss Oman – UK business trade relations and focused on education & training, touring the new Takatuf-Petrofac Oman Centre of Excellence and meeting with the National Training Fund to discuss vocational training. He also hosted an Oil & Gas networking reception and spoke about the strength of the bilateral relationship in oil and gas, both historically and looking forward.

At the end of his visit, Lord Astor said:

“I was pleased to visit Oman again in my role as the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy. Oman is a country I have a long affinity with and it is important to the UK. As a Trade Envoy, I work closely with the Trade Team at the British Embassy in Muscat and organisations in the UK to help boost links and create opportunities for UK and Omani businesses to work together.

The UK is the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Oman by far, accounting for over 45% of total FDI. The majority of this investment is

in the oil and gas sector in Oman, both in upstream exploration and production and, increasingly, in the development of downstream oil and gas industry. Bilateral cooperation on education and training, both within oil and gas and across the board, underpins economic development, and I am delighted to see British industry working with Omani institutions to deliver high quality training in Oman. There is a strong appetite in Oman to see more trade with the UK and we are keen to continue to build, strengthen and support that relationship.”