

Fairer funding for schools

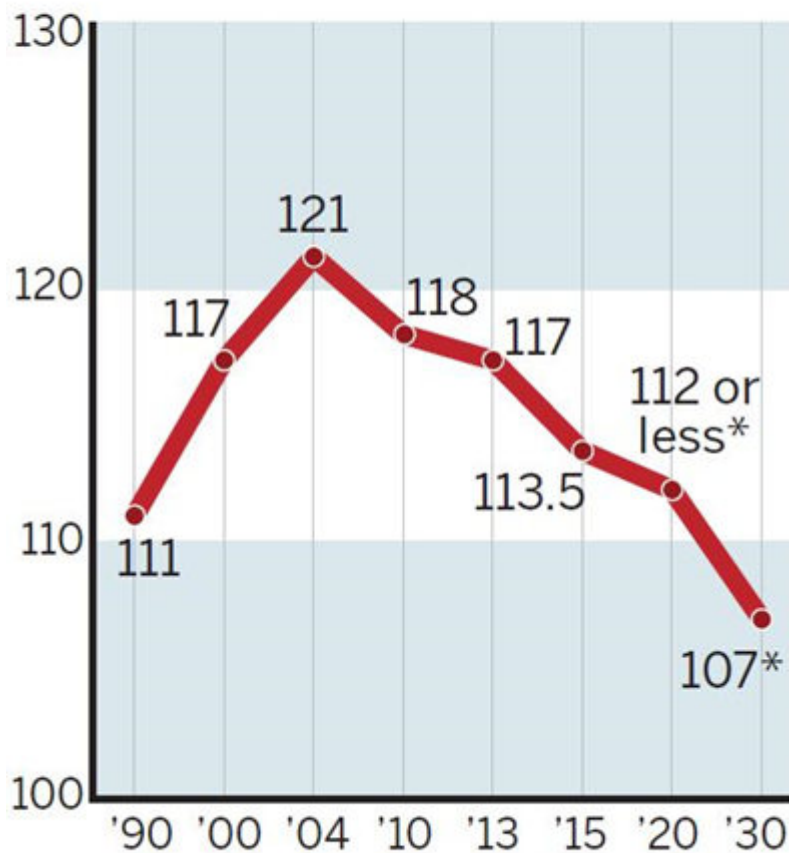
On Wednesday we debated the government's proposals for fairer funding for schools. The Conservative Manifesto drew attention to the large gap between the best financed and worst financed state schools and promised action to provide fairer and more balanced levels of funding. The scheme includes a higher individual pupil amount that will be the same across the country, with continued additional payments for areas of deprivation, rural areas and other matters increasing the costs of education.

I raised with the Minister the question of how far the rebalancing would go. The Wokingham and West Berkshire schools have been short changed for many years by the old formula and need several years of increments to put things right.

Report: China's sex ratio to balance out by 2030

Sex ratio at birth

Number of men to every 100 women
* forecast



Source: National Health and Family Planning Commission

China's sex ratio at birth will keep falling and eventually reach a balance within 15 years due to economic and social development and the relaxed family planning policy, the central government has predicted.

The ratio, which was 113.5 men to every 100 women in 2015, one of the highest in the world, is forecast to drop below 112 by 2020 and 107 by 2030, according to the National Population Development Outline released Wednesday by the State Council.

The normal range is between 103 and 107.

China's sex ratio has been skewed by a traditional preference for boys. Population experts have estimated that the imbalance over the past 30 years has resulted in between 24 million and 34 million more men than women.

Wang Pei'an, vice-minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, has warned that the gender imbalance could result in serious social problems.

However, thanks to rising social awareness and government efforts, China's

sex ratio at birth has declined in recent years. A national guideline released this month said the authorities will continue to intensify the fight against fetus gender identification and sex-selective abortions.

Wednesday's outline estimated that China will see its population peak at 1.45 billion around 2030.

To better monitor demographic changes, the country plans to establish a population forecast system based on censuses and samples surveys that will produce regular reports, the outline said.

It also said governments will continue to monitor the effect of the universal second-child policy as well as closely follow changes in the fertility rate to decide on possible adjustment to the family planning policy.

Yuan Xin, a professor of population studies at Nankai University in Tianjin, said the second-child policy will contribute to a lower sex ratio at birth because it will result in a higher fertility rate, but he added, "The family planning policy should be further relaxed so the ratio can be reduced to a balanced level."

He agreed with predictions that the second-child policy will result in a peak in births in the next few years, but he warned the effect may decline gradually due to the reduced number of women of childbearing age.

About 90 million women became eligible to have another child when the second-child policy was introduced early last year. However, half were aged 40 or older, meaning they are less likely to give birth again, Yuan said.

"Adjustment to the policies should be based on consistent monitoring of the population. A scientific evaluation should be made," the professor added.

[China mulls pharmacy law on rational medicine use](#)



China is working on a law that will help pharmacists properly prepare and allocate medicine. [Photo: xinhua]

China is working on a law that will help pharmacists properly prepare and allocate medicine, according to the country's health authorities.

The top legislature has been working with other departments to carry out research into the law, and will solicit suggestions and opinions from various sectors, said Liang Wannian, a senior official with the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

According to Wang Hesheng, director of the medical reform office under the State Council, China's cabinet, the average increase of medical fees in public hospitals will be kept under 10 percent this year.

Wang said that measures will be taken this year to address markups on drug costs by public hospitals and to improve the reimbursement system.

[It is beyond belief that our Prime Minister is bartering away our health service in her desperation for post-Brexit trade deals – Ashworth](#)

Jonathan

Ashworth, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, commenting on reports that the Prime Minister has

refused to exclude health services from a possible trade deal with the US, said:

“It is beyond belief that our Prime Minister is bartering away our health service in her desperation for post-Brexit trade deals. Labour is committed to the NHS both free at the point of use and free at the point of delivery. Theresa May has presided over the worst winter for the NHS in years and she must not now be allowed to sell off the NHS to big US healthcare corporations.

“Labour will oppose any attempt to sell off our health service. The Prime Minister needs to urgently confirm that a rushed trade deal with President Trump will not be a Trojan horse for NHS privatisation. The British people did not vote for Theresa May to use our NHS as a bargaining chip with Donald Trump.”

[News story: Defence Secretary marks Australia Day](#)

The UK and Australia share an important Defence relationship, Sir Michael said as he addressed guests at an Australia Day reception at the Australian High Commission in London.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The bonds that bind Britain and Australia are deeper than those of any alliance of necessity or pact of mutual interest; we are family.

A century ago we fought shoulder-to-shoulder at the Battle of Passchendaele. In the present time our bond is ever more relevant as we fight modern evils; flying wing-tip to wing-tip in Iraq and Syria to hit Daesh hard, training the Afghan Army in Kabul together and sharing crucial intelligence – all things that make us both safer and more secure at home.

But our bonds are those of mutual prosperity too. Backed by a rising Defence budget, Britain will also continue to open up new possibilities in trade and innovation with Australia as the UK steps up as Global Britain.

Later this year the Defence Secretary will attend the annual Australia-UK

Ministerial Meeting, to discuss foreign, defence and security policy, alongside the Foreign Secretary and their Australian counterparts.

In future, the UK will take part in a variety of joint operations and Defence Engagement with Australia. In 2018 a Royal Navy frigate will visit the Asia Pacific and participate in an annual Five Power Defence Arrangements Exercise.

Australia will also host the 2018 Invictus Games for wounded, injured and sick military personnel and veterans, in Sydney.