

[News story: £2.5 million to boost international exchanges for schools](#)

Thousands more young people will have the chance to take part in international exchanges and visits thanks to a new £2.5 million programme, the Education Secretary announced today (19 January).

Schools in England will be able to apply for grants to take pupils aged 11 and above to visit partner schools around the world, giving them the chance to experience different cultures, improve language skills and build independence, character and resilience.

The programme, which will be principally focused on supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds, will be run in partnership with the British Council – whose [own research](#) has found that only 39% of secondary schools run international exchanges. For independent schools, the figure is 77%.

As education ministers from around the world prepare to gather in London for the Education World Forum, Damian Hinds has stressed the importance of ensuring disadvantaged young people don't miss out on the life-changing experiences and academic opportunities offered by overseas visits.

Evidence shows that businesses are increasingly looking for employees with international experience and language skills – and, according to a British Council survey, almost two-thirds of university language students said that an international exchange helped inspire them to choose their degree course.

The programme will build on the government's work to encourage more pupils to study a foreign language, including their inclusion in the English Baccalaureate. Since 2010 we have seen 45% more entries in GCSE Chinese and 51% more entries in GCSE Spanish.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

I want every child to have a world-class education, and that includes the opportunity to experience other cultures and go to places they wouldn't normally visit – whether that's practising their Mandarin in China or learning about American history in the US.

School exchanges are so valuable, bringing subjects such as modern languages and international history to life as well as helping pupils develop into confident, independent and well-rounded young people.

As Britain leaves the European Union, it's more important than ever to show how much we value international opportunities, language-learning, and ensuring our young people have a global outlook – something I'll be discussing with education ministers from around the world at Education World Forum.

This investment will help schools who may not have much experience organising trips abroad to ensure their pupils don't miss out on all the fantastic benefits these experiences can bring, encouraging children to broaden their horizons and aim high throughout their education and beyond.

Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive of the British Council, said:

Pupils keep the memory of a school trip abroad for the rest of their lives – it is an important first step in understanding the world. It encourages children to think about working and studying overseas and sows the seeds of international co-operation that we encourage in young people all around the world.

The programme's focus on disadvantaged pupils was also welcomed by schools.

Geoff Lumsdon, headteacher at Seaham High School in County Durham, said:

This programme will expand students' international horizons and experience, delivering on our school's vision to help the young people of Seaham to achieve the highest possible outcomes and to make a valuable contribution to the global society in which we all now live.

Many of our students receive the Pupil Premium and we do our utmost to ensure equality of opportunity so that all of our pupils feel safe, secure, and are free from prejudice and able to develop a mutual respect for others. This is an exciting opportunity to ensure every young person can access international and multicultural experiences so they are ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century – and we would be delighted to participate.

Funding will be targeted at schools with above-average numbers of pupil-premium students. Over the course of the programme, it is estimated that trips could be funded for 2,900 pupils. Young people will be encouraged to stay with host families abroad where possible, maximising their opportunity to practise language skills and be fully immersed in another culture.

To make the scheme as easy as possible for schools to take part in, there will be a simple application process, grants to cover the administrative cost of organising trips, and seminars to help schools without much experience of international visits find partner institutions abroad – in Europe or further afield.

Schools will be able to register their interest on the British Council website from Monday.