

# [News story: Next phase of multi-million pound college improvement fund launches](#)

More colleges will benefit from a multi-million pound initiative to drive improvements across further education as the second round of the Strategic College Improvement Fund (SCIF) [launches today](#) (6 November).

The Government is transforming technical education in this country, introducing new, gold standard T Levels from 2020 – the technical equivalent to A Levels – and supporting the creation of more high quality apprenticeships.

The SCIF was launched in June 2018 following calls from the sector for a peer-to-peer support programme where stronger colleges help weaker ones to improve. It follows a successful pilot phase, which saw fourteen colleges receive grants totaling over £2million. Outcomes from the pilot showed strong support for the partnership model, and led to colleges reporting that the fund helped build awareness of good practice, fostered mutual learning and enabled rapid action to improve quality.

Alongside the National Leaders of Further Education and National Leaders of Governance programmes, the £15 million SCIF is playing a vital role helping to share best practice, expertise and boost standards so more people can access high quality education and training. Colleges in need of support can apply for funding to work with a stronger ‘partnering’ college to tackle the issues they face and improve quality.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

Colleges are an extremely important part of our education system, and are absolutely central to our technical education reforms. They play an essential role in making sure people of all ages and backgrounds have the skills they need to get on in life.

I’m thrilled to invite even more colleges to apply for funding from the SCIF. By working together with top colleges, they will get the support they need to make sure their learners get the very best education and training. This will mean more opportunities for people right across the country to access high-quality education and training.

David Corke, Director of Policy at the Association of Colleges, said:

We’ve been working closely with the Government on this initiative and it’s now great to see the development of a peer improvement

programme from a sector capacity and capability point of view. It is important to continue to share best practice and look at ways we can continually drive up quality within the sector.

Sixth Form Colleges Association Chief Executive Bill Watkin said:

The Strategic College Improvement Fund has already made a difference to several colleges and the students who attend them, with its focus on identifying where needs are and how those needs can best be met. The SCIF is a valuable framework that supports the sharing of good practice, ensuring that areas for development can be addressed through collaborative approaches with well-matched partners.

We are delighted that Round 2 has been launched and highly recommend that colleges take this opportunity to work with each other to raise, and sustain, standards across the sector.

Deputy Further Education Commissioner SCIF Lead Teresa Kelly said:

It is very exciting that the SCIF has been taken up so positively by the sector and is proving to be a significant tool for quality improvement in colleges. Through the SCIF many colleges are now harnessing the best practice that exists within the sector and applying proven best practice in order to improve the quality of their offer and provision.

The SCIF is enabling colleges to deep dive into developing and improving practical classroom based teaching techniques that will improve the student experience and ultimately the overall performance of the sector.

The list of successful colleges and their partners from the first application round will be published later this month.

---

## **Press release: Readout of PM call with Sebastian Kurz: 5 November 2018**

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz this

evening.

The Prime Minister updated the Chancellor on the progress of Brexit negotiations saying that 95% of the Withdrawal Agreement was now complete, and that she was confident that a solution could be found on the Northern Ireland backstop.

The Prime Minister added that the UK wanted to see quick progress and that both the UK and the EU were working hard to achieve an agreement.

Chancellor Kurz said that the Austrian Presidency stood ready to help facilitate an agreement as soon as possible.

---

## **Press release: Readout of PM call with Justin Trudeau: 5 November 2018**

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau this evening.

The Prime Minister said she was delighted that Canada had selected the UK's cutting-edge Type 26 warship for its future frigate programme, noting it demonstrated the strength of our defence relationship.

They discussed Saudi Arabia and the appalling murder of Jamal Khashoggi, agreeing that there remained an urgent need to establish what had happened and for those responsible to be held to account.

They agreed that the international community should continue to encourage a thorough, credible, and transparent investigation by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

On Yemen, they agreed on the pressing need to alleviate the humanitarian situation and reach a political solution. The Prime Minister said we supported the US call for de-escalation in Yemen, noting that it must be underpinned by a political deal between the conflict parties.

They looked forward to seeing each other at the G20 summit in Argentina at the end of the month.

---

## Statement to Parliament: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has made a statement to the House today.

Mr Speaker, I'd like to make a statement on the changes announced to Universal Credit in the Budget last week and on the Managed Migration regulations, which we are laying in the house today.

The Chancellor announced a substantial package at the Budget to ensure that millions keep more of what they earn, and vulnerable claimants are supported when they move to Universal Credit.

In total, Mr Speaker, this package will be worth an extra £4.5 billion across the next 5 years.

I want to pay a special thank you to all the colleagues, charities, third-sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants who fed back to me to build this package of support to ensure Universal Credit is a fair system – supporting thousands who can't work as well as thousands who can.

And I'd like to also thank my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister and my Right Honourable Friend the Chancellor for their support to deliver these measures.

Because make no mistake, Mr Speaker: this is a department that listens. And a department that will continue to listen, adapt, change and deliver.

We will put an extra £1.7 billion a year into work allowances, increasing the amount that hardworking families can earn by £1,000 before Universal Credit is tapered away – providing extra support for 2.4 million working families.

Which is why it was welcomed not only in this House, but amongst charities.

Like the Child Poverty Action Group, which said: "The work allowance increase is unequivocally good news for families receiving Universal Credit".

And the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said this extra investment "will help make Universal Credit a tool for tackling poverty".

And, we have gone further – recognising the genuine concerns raised about the support we were offering people, especially to the most vulnerable, when they move to Universal Credit.

So we have made a further £1 billion package of changes, providing 2 additional weeks of DWP legacy benefits for those moved onto Universal Credit – a one-off non-repayable sum that will provide claimants with extra money during the period before they receive their first Universal Credit payment.

And this is on top of the 2 additional weeks of Housing Benefit announced at Autumn Budget 2017, and put into place this year.

And we will support the self-employed moving to Universal Credit.

We will open up a 12-month grace period before the Minimum Income Floor is applied, supporting 130,000 self-employed claimants.

Because we are the party of business, we are the party of aspiration.

We will support those in debt by reducing the normal maximum rate at which debts are deducted from Universal Credit awards, from 40% to 30% of Standard Allowances.

This will help over 600,000 families to manage their debts at any one point when roll out is complete – providing them with, on average, £295 extra a year as their debts are repaid over a longer period.

Mr Speaker, this is targeted support to help work pay and support the vulnerable.

Which is why today I lay regulations to deliver the next phase of Universal Credit – Managed Migration.

Through which people will be moved onto Universal Credit.

A move from a system that trapped people on benefits and creating cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours with punitive effective tax rates of over 90 per cent for some.

Between 1997 and 2010, benefit spend went up by 65%.

In 1997, households were paying £5,500 in taxes to fund the benefits system – and by 2010 it had risen to £8,350.

[Political content]

Under this Government 3.4 million more people are in work – the vast majority of which are full-time and permanent roles.

Which means that we have created more new jobs in the UK since 2010, than France, Spain, Ireland, Netherlands, Austria and Norway combined.

Alongside creating a welfare system that supports those who need it.

Through Universal Credit, around 1 million disabled households will receive around an extra £100 on average per month through more generous support.

The managed migration regulations will, in addition:

- protect 500,000 people's Severe Disability Premium at the point of migration
- deliver Transitional Protection for those we move, to ensure that at the point of moving, those managed migrated have their entitlements protected

We will take a measured approach to delivering Managed Migration, taking our time to get it right and working with claimants to co-design it.

We have and will continue to take on board the advice of experts and charities.

Such as the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) – whose [report on the regulations we have published, along with our response today](#).

And we have accepted in full or part all but one of their recommendations.

And the one we didn't is because we want to be more generous!

I pay tribute to the hard work of SSAC in scrutinising our regulations.

And we have changed a key part of the regulations, which charities have raised with me, my department and MPs.

Which relates to the minimum statutory notice period for people moving from their legacy award to Universal Credit.

We have extended this period from a minimum of 1 month to a minimum of 3 months – to allow claimants maximum time to prepare and make their claim before their legacy award expires.

Alongside this, we have unlimited flexibility to extend claim periods for people who need it.

We will also backdate any claimant who has missed the deadline date, but has made a claim within a month of the deadline day passing.

And we will test a variety of communications methods, including advertising campaigns, face to face communication, letters, texts, telephone calls and home visits.

Mr Speaker, this will provide support for claimants during managed migration.

And we will constantly review our approaches, engage fully with charities, experts, claimants and all members of this House.

Mr Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

---

## **Statement to Parliament: Announcement on probate fees**

I have today laid before Parliament new legislation to implement a new, banded structure of fees for a grant of representation, commonly known as a

grant of probate.

Fees are an essential element of funding an effective, modern courts and tribunals service, thereby ensuring and protecting access to justice.

The Government is investing £1 billion to modernise and upgrade the courts system so that it works even better for everyone, including victims, witnesses, litigants, judges and legal professionals. This includes introducing changes to our Probate Service, who offer an important service to those who are bereaved.

The reform of the service allows people to apply for a grant of probate online, access assisted digital support for those who may not necessarily have the skills or access to engage digitally and empowers individuals to make applications themselves instead of needing to instruct and pay for solicitors. This aims to reduce the burden on applicants, by providing a more efficient and simpler application process.

But such a courts system is simply not possible without proper funding. Since the previous Government set out its intentions to introduce a banded fee structure for grants of probate in February 2017, a number of concerns were raised. We have listened to these very carefully, and under today's proposal we have revised fees so they will never be more than 0.5% of the value of the estate.

Moreover, by raising the estate value threshold from £5,000 to £50,000, we will be lifting around 25,000 estates annually out of fees altogether. For those who do pay, around 80% of estates will pay £750 or less, and all income raised will be spent on running the courts and tribunal service.

It has long been the case that the users of our courts make a contribution to its costs, and we believe this remains both relevant and reasonable – minimising the burden on other taxpayers. Crucially, by asking those who use the courts to pay more, where they can afford to do so, we are able to fund areas where we charge no fees to vulnerable victims and users, including for example domestic violence and non-molestation orders, and for cases before the First-tier Tribunal concerning mental health.

This new banded fee model represents a fair and more progressive way to pay for probate services compared to the current flat fee and reflects our commitment to protecting access to justice by ensuring we have a properly funded and resourced courts system. We are also confident these fees will never be unaffordable. The cost of the fee is recoverable from the estate and executors have several options to fund it. Moreover, the Lord Chancellor retains a power to remit a fee if he considers there are exceptional circumstances.

We will also publish a guidance document before the Statutory Instrument comes into force, entitled Guidance on Ways to Pay for Probate Fees. This will benefit from external stakeholder input, and will help applicants to choose the option to pay which most suits their circumstances, providing reassurance at a difficult time.