

[Press release: Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Montenegro](#)

2015 – present FCO, Temporary duties in the Middle East & North Africa, Finance and Prosperity Directorates 2013 – 2015 Sana'a, Deputy Head of Mission 2013 Full time language training (Arabic) 2010 – 2012 FCO, Head of Policy Unit, National Security, Middle East, North Africa & South Asia 2008 – 2010 FCO, Deputy Director Estates & Sustainability, Estates and Security Department 2007 Kurdistan Region & Northern Iraq, Consul General 2006 – 2007 Liberia, Political Chargé 2004 – 2005 FCO, Near East Team Leader, Arab, Israel North Africa Group 2002 – 2004 FCO, Head of Political Team, Afghanistan Unit 1999 – 2002 Colombo, Second Secretary Political 1997 – 1998 FCO, Desk Officer Greece and Cyprus 1997 Joined FCO

[Press release: HS2 marks National Apprenticeship Week by launching its search for apprentices](#)

Work can now begin on Britain's new railway after the first phase of the route between the Midlands and London secured Royal Assent last month. High Speed Two (HS2) will create around 25,000 jobs during construction as well as 2,000 apprenticeships. It will also support growth in the wider economy, worth an additional 100,000 jobs.

HS2 apprentices will develop skills in areas such as engineering and project management, while getting paid to play a part in building Europe's largest infrastructure scheme which will create more space on our congested railways for passengers and freight and improve connections between the biggest cities and regions.

The launch of the HS2 Ltd apprenticeship scheme comes as former apprentice and newly appointed CEO, Mark Thurston joins HS2 Ltd. As a former Transport for London apprentice, Mark is understandably a strong advocate of the apprenticeship scheme.

Commenting on HS2 Ltd's apprenticeship scheme, Mark said:

My own career path demonstrates that apprenticeships can lead to a rewarding career, and I'm delighted that HS2 is playing its part in creating a talent pool for the future. Our commitment to creating 2,000 apprenticeships across the project will play a key role in the development of a highly-skilled workforce in the high speed rail industry.

HS2's apprenticeship scheme marks a commitment by the company to bring new people into the business and create meaningful career opportunities that combine work experience with recognised qualifications.

The application process for the first 26 Level 3-4 vacancies opens today, with career opportunities in project planning, project management, project controls and procurement. Twenty of the posts will be based at HS2 Ltd's headquarters in Birmingham, with the remaining 6 positions based in London.

HS2 Ltd is keen to encourage a diverse range of candidates. The vacancies are open to everyone from school leavers to parents returning to work, or those looking for a new challenge. To qualify, candidates must hold 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths.

All successful candidates will start in post from September 2017.

HS2 is playing a key role in implementing the Transport Infrastructure Skills Strategy, delivering 30,000 apprenticeships in roads and rail by 2020 and gender parity by 2030.

Fairer funding for schools

I along with MPs with similarly placed constituencies urged the Coalition government to narrow the large gap between the money going to schools in some parts of the country and the much smaller sums going to schools in places like West Berkshire and Wokingham. Conservatives were not able to get agreement in coalition, but did put a commitment to fairer funding in the Conservative 2015 Manifesto.

Ministers have since been working on a scheme. This is currently out to consultation. The request for people to write in on the "National Funding Formula" was first issued on 14 December. The closing date is 22 March. I am writing to remind those interested as they might like to send in their thoughts.

I have put the case to Ministers along with other MPs on several occasions. I will be having another meeting with the Secretary of State shortly about it again. The case is very simple. The main cost of education for each pupil is similar around the country, as it is based on teacher pay and other staff wages paid at national rates. Of course there should be extra money for pupils that require more support, and to recognise problems in deprived areas. There also needs to be some recognition of higher property and support costs in expensive parts of the country. The current gap between the highest and lowest funding, at more than 100% of the lowest level, is too great.

I have asked for the introduction of a new system as soon as possible, and for further transitional increases in money whilst we are awaiting a fair

funding answer. The total support per pupil needs to be sufficient for decent provision. Individual schools may have other budget problems. If a school is unable to recruit sufficient pupils then its total funding will drop, and that may force it to reduce the number of subject options as it adjusts its teaching numbers to the lesser number of pupils.

In 2014-15 the per pupil funding of English schools ranged from £8595 per head in the City of London to just £3950 in the lowest funded authority. The average was £4550. Wokingham received £4125 and West Berkshire £4367.

The contact is SchoolsNationalFundingFormula.CONSULTATION@education.gov.uk

Captcha

Some object to this entry test. I have changed server for a variety of good reasons. I was getting a large number of computer inspired nonsense contributions and some advert contributions which I need to keep out, and am told this is the best way to do so. I will make enquiries to see if there is any other way to stop this material.

Some also query how I select which items to post. Let me repeat I delete

1. Any unduly long post unless well written, relevant and easy to approve
2. Any post with unproven allegations or prejudicial language about people or institutions, whilst allowing more latitude in criticisms of government
3. Frequent posts from the same person on the same topic, unless they are easy to post
4. Any post with a cited reference to other websites unless they are to official ones or ones I know. I am always happy to see a citation to the ONS or the Fed etc.

I do not delete posts that disagree with me or the Conservative government, and do delete posts that are personally disobliging about people in all political parties whatever the merits of the case.

Promoting Cruise in Wales at a Global event

SeaTrade is the cruise industry's premier global event and is the only event guaranteed to bring together every facet of the business, including cruise

lines, suppliers, travel agents and partners. With 700+ Exhibitors from all over the world, SeaTrade Cruise Global draws in visitors to meet new vendors, and source new products, ideas and solutions.

Cruise is big business for Wales and is worth nearly £3 million to the Welsh economy – 2017 will see 89 cruise calls to Wales with 37,000 passengers and 15,000 crew – an increase in calls of 33% year on year.

Previous attendance at the SeaTrade event has secured further business from new cruise lines who wish to visit Wales.

For the 2017 event, Visit Wales will be promoting the arrival of the Volvo Ocean Race along with Year of the Sea in 2018. Cardiff has been chosen as the destination for the first Volvo Ocean Race transatlantic leg to the United Kingdom in 12 years when the world's leading offshore race makes its debut visit to Wales in 2018. This around the world yacht race is held every three years and is widely regarded as one of the most challenging endurance events of its kind.

The cruise ship market is big business for Wales – and Cruise Wales and partners are working hard to grow the market. An increasing number of visitors from Germany are coming to south west Wales through cruise ships docking at Swansea, Milford Haven Port, Pembroke and Fishguard. Following Tourism Investment Support Scheme funding for the floating pontoon at Fishguard to allow larger vessels to anchor, Fishguard calls have increased from 5 in 2015 to 31 for 2017.

Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates, said:

“The cruise market has been highlighted in the tourism strategy for Wales as one way of growing the tourism industry in Wales by 10% by 2020 and Cruise is one of the fastest growing sectors year on year. We are working with many outside stakeholders and are looking at various infrastructure developments for cruise. SeaTrade gives us a great opportunity to keep Wales front of mind with cruise liners, travel agents and partners and to promote Wales as a new product.

The arrival of the Volvo Ocean Race also gives a great platform to talk about what Wales has to offer – but also to promote next year's Cardiff stopover to an important US audience.”