

Space Rocket Challenges for the engineers of tomorrow

The challenges, taking place between 16-30 June, will give participants the chance to design their own space rocket, make a rocket at home and learn more about the UK's space sector.

There will be three challenges that are open to all ages and include: a Space Rocket design competition, Launch and Land challenge – as part of NPL's regular Measurement at Home series, and a space-themed quiz.

Entries are welcome from individuals, teams, families, schools – anyone who can stretch their imagination to infinity and beyond. Experts at NPL and UK Space Agency will judge all entries and prizes, including a 3D-printed model of the winning rocket design and a tour of British Aerospace Manufacturer, Reaction Engines' facility in Oxfordshire.

Professor Richard Crowther, Chief Engineer, UK Space Agency said:

The UK has played a pioneering role in space science for over 50 years and today our ambition is to be Europe's leading small satellite launch destination. We look forward to seeing the creativity and imagination of these young engineers. Perhaps one day they could be designing the rockets we see launching from UK spaceports, propelling us into a new era of space exploration.

As the UK's National Measurement Institute, NPL recognises the importance of promoting STEM activities and inspiring the next generation. The UK Space Agency supports STEM-based activity addressing the skills needs of the space sector and to raise awareness of the UK's space programme and STEM subjects in general.

Andrew Hanson MBE, Outreach Manager, NPL said:

We've been running NPL Water Rockets for over 20 years, and in 2020 are super-excited to be teaming up with UKSA with several novel twists to engage a wide audience taking creative engineering into space. NPL's outreach activity, whilst offering fun and engaging ways of interacting with STEM, is also key to raising the importance of STEM education and the relevance of measurement science to our everyday lives.

The restrictions faced by everyone in the last few months means NPL is unable to run the 21st NPL Water Rocket Challenge in the usual format, but by turning it into a virtual rocket-based event, NPL hopes participants can still have fun, learn about science and the UK's space sector and compete to

win great prizes.

To find out more visit [NPL's Space Rocket Challenges for 2020](#).

[Estate agent directors disqualified for roles in illegal cartel](#)

Stephen Jones and Neil Mackenzie were directors at estate agents Richard Worth and Michael Hardy, respectively, from September 2008 to May 2015. During this time, their firms took part in a cartel with 2 other local estate agents in which they conspired together to set minimum rates for commission on the sale of residential properties in Wokingham, Winnersh, Crowthorne, Bracknell and Warfield – where they were the leading estate agents at that time.

Both have now been disqualified for 6 and a half years for their roles in the cartel, meaning they cannot act as directors of any companies or be involved in the management of any company based in England, Scotland or Wales during this time.

The move follows a Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) investigation into the cartel, which found that the 4 estate agents maintained the illegal activity for almost 7 years. They exchanged confidential information on pricing and held meetings to make sure all members of the cartel enforced and maintained the agreed minimum rates.

This meant that homeowners in the affected areas were denied the chance of securing the best possible deal when selling their property because they were unable to meaningfully shop around all their local estate agents for a better commission rate.

And, as a result, 3 of the 4 estate agents – including Richard Worth and Michael Hardy – were [fined over £600,000 for their illegal behaviour](#).

Michael Grenfell, Executive Director of Enforcement, said:

Selling your home can be a stressful and expensive experience, and one that shouldn't be made harder by estate agents conspiring to cheat homeowners out of the best deal.

Company directors have an important responsibility to make sure their firms don't take part in this kind of anti-competitive behaviour.

Today's disqualifications should send a clear message to the sector – stay on the right side of the law or face the consequences.

The 2 disqualifications announced today bring the total number of directors disqualified following a CMA investigation to 18. As part of the Company Directors Disqualification Act, the CMA can seek the disqualification of any director where their company has broken competition law. It is one of a number of tools the CMA can use to protect consumers from anti-competitive behaviour.

The CMA also runs a '[Cheating or competing?](#)' campaign, which aims to educate businesses about which practices are illegal and urges people to come forward if they suspect a business has taken part in cartel behaviour, such as rigging contracts or price fixing. It has also issued a range of guidance to help businesses understand more about how to comply with competition law.

1. The disqualification undertakings are available on the [CMA's case page](#). Mr Jones and Mr Mackenzie each gave disqualification undertakings after the CMA commenced court proceedings seeking orders for their disqualification. The CMA's acceptance of the undertakings given by Mr Jones and Mr Mackenzie brings those court proceedings to an end.
2. Under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, the CMA has the power to apply to the court for an order disqualifying a director from holding company directorships or performing certain roles in relation to a company for a specified period if a company of which he or she is a director has breached competition law and their conduct makes them unfit to be a director or be involved in the management of a company. The Act also allows the CMA to accept a disqualification undertaking from a director instead of bringing proceedings. A disqualification undertaking has the same legal effect as a disqualification order.
3. The other 2 estate agency firms involved in the illegal minimum fee arrangement qualified for leniency under the [CMA's leniency policy](#). Under the policy the CMA will not seek the disqualification of their cooperating directors, as long as the estate agents continue to comply with the terms of their leniency agreements with the CMA.
4. The CMA is also currently seeking director disqualifications in 2 further separate proceedings before the court. One in relation to its probe into [Residential estate agency services in the Burnham-on-Sea area](#), and one in relation to its [Supply of precast concrete drainage products: civil investigation](#).
5. The total number of directors disqualified following a CMA investigation includes 1 director who was disqualified on his conviction for the criminal cartel offence in relation to the [supply of precast concrete drainage products](#)
6. For more information on the CMA follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on Competition Act 1998 and civil cartels cases.
7. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk, or call 020 3738 6460.

Avian Influenza: UK disease-free with continued vigilance required

Press release

The UK now meets international requirements to declare freedom from Avian Influenza, as the chief vet urges continued vigilance.



Chickens on free range poultry farm. Credit Getty images

The Chief Veterinary Officer has announced the UK has met international requirements to declare itself free from Avian Influenza (AI) H5N3, but reiterated calls for all poultry keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease, as there is a real and constant threat.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continues to circulate in Europe and as winter approaches later in the year, the risk of migratory wild birds infecting domestic poultry will rise. The UK was previously declared free of Avian Flu in September 2017 and has remained free of highly pathogenic avian influenza since then. But a low pathogenic strain disease returned in December 2019 which was quickly met by Government action.

In December, a single case of low pathogenic avian flu of the H5N3 strain, which poses no threat to human health, was confirmed at a commercial chicken farm in Suffolk. The Animal and Plant Health Agency put movement restrictions in place to limit the spread of disease and carried out thorough investigations into the source and possible spread of infection and concluded that the most likely source was indirect contact with wild birds. The full epidemiology report is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The UK Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), Christine Middlemiss, urged keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease and reiterated [the need for good biosecurity at all times](#):

Declaring the UK free from avian flu is an important milestone that will help our efforts to re-open export markets. The case in December was met with swift action by the APHA and industry and I would like to thank everyone for their efforts in helping us to very effectively contain the disease.

However, I urge all keepers to be vigilant – there is a constant risk of avian flu from wild birds and this will increase later in the year when winter approaches, temperatures fall, and migratory birds arrive in the UK.

All poultry keepers should take steps to reduce the risk to their birds by maintaining good robust biosecurity at all times, such as cleaning footwear, feeding birds indoors, and minimising contact with wild birds. Building these simple actions into routines now can help prepare for any future outbreaks.

The government continues to monitor the international situation and carry out surveillance in poultry and wild birds and publish regular disease updates.

Further information

- Under World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) rules, three months must elapse from the application of measures to prevent the spread of disease after cleansing and disinfection of the last infected premises before a country can be declared disease-free. Countries are required to fulfil a number of requirements on biosecure disposal of carcasses, the application of effective disinfection and surveillance.
- H5N3 avian flu was confirmed at a commercial premises in Suffolk on 10 December 2019 with further information available [here](#). Secondary cleansing and disinfection was completed on 13 March 2020.
- The UK CV0 will declare on the UK's behalf by submitting an evidence paper to OIE for publication on the OIE WAHIS website alongside other countries that have already self-declared.
- Read and download our latest biosecurity guidance and our advice poster for keepers of poultry (PDF, 1 page).

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[Prime Minister's article in the Telegraph: 15 June 2020](#)

It was utterly absurd that a load of far-right thugs and bover boys yesterday converged on London with a mission to protect the statue of Winston

Churchill. It was right that a good number should have been arrested. They were violent. They were aggressive towards the police. They were patently racist. There is nothing that can excuse their behaviour.

And yet it was also, frankly, absurd and deplorable that the statue of Winston Churchill should have been in any plausible danger of attack. It was outrageous that anyone could even have claimed that the statue needed protection. It was and is miserable to see his statue entombed in its protective sheath.

It is true that the monument has been covered up several times before, in anticipation of trouble, after consultation with the Mayor's office and English Heritage, because the police believe that is the safest and simplest thing to do. But many people will look at that image and feel a sense of bewilderment.

Why attack Churchill? What has the world come to when one of this country's greatest ever leaders – perhaps our greatest – has to be shielded from the wrath of the mob? We all understand the depth of feeling that has been exposed by the killing, in Minnesota, of George Floyd. No one who cares about this country can ignore the many thousands of people who have joined the Black Lives Movement to protest peacefully, as most of them have, in the last few days. It is no use just saying that we have made huge progress in tackling racism.

There is much more that we need to do; and we will. It is time for a cross-governmental commission to look at all aspects of inequality – in employment, in health outcomes, in academic and all other walks of life. We need to tackle the substance of the problem, not the symbols. We need to address the present, not attempt to re-write the past – and that means we cannot and must not get sucked into never-ending debate about which well-known historical figure is sufficiently pure or politically correct to remain in public view.

Where will it end? Are we supposed to haul down Cromwell who killed so many thousands of people in Ireland? What about Nelson and all the other innumerable reminders of this country's imperial past? Take the case of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, whose portrait hangs in Room 15 of the National Portrait Gallery. He was a native of the Gambia who was known and admired in C18 London as a translator of Arab texts. He was also, originally, a slaver himself. Does that mean he should be purged from the Gallery?

My point is that our history is immensely complex, and modern Britain is a product of a vast conglomerate of ideas and beliefs – not all of which look good in the light of today. Yes, Churchill expressed all sorts of views over his immense career – and bear in mind that he entered parliament under Queen Victoria and left it under Queen Elizabeth – which are totally unacceptable to modern ears.

As it happens, he generally changed with the times. He changed his view on India, and her capacity for independence; and whatever he may have said about Islam in the 1890s, he also built the Regent's Park Mosque in the 1940s. And above all – as so many have rightly pointed out – it is the height of lunacy

to accuse him of racism, when he stood alone against a racist tyranny that without his resistance would have overwhelmed this country and the rest of Europe.

He was a hero, and I expect I am not alone in saying that I will resist with every breath in my body any attempt to remove that statue from Parliament Square, and the sooner his protective shielding comes off the better.

It is not just that is wrong to destroy public property by violence. I am also extremely dubious about the growing campaign to edit or photoshop the entire cultural landscape. If we start purging the record and removing the images of all but those whose attitudes conform to our own, we are engaged in a great lie, a distortion of our history – like some public figure furtively trying to make themselves look better by editing their own Wikipedia entry.

Would it not be better and more honest to ask our children to understand the context, to explain the mixture of good and bad in the career of Churchill and everyone else? And rather than tear some people down, we should build others up, and celebrate the people who we in this generation believe are worthy of memorial. We have brilliant sculptors and artists. Why should they not be commissioned to make fitting additions to the landscape and cityscape? Take the great courtyard in the Foreign and Commonwealth office, where stone statues of British explorers and imperialists look down from the niches. Many of the niches are for some reason unfilled.

Rather than tear down the past, why not add some of the men and women – most often BAME – who helped to make our modern Commonwealth and our modern world? Isn't that a more cheerful approach?

This new vogue for politically correct iconoclasm is not just dispiriting, and unfair, and often ahistorical. Worst of all, it is a total distraction from the matter in hand. It does nothing for BAME people to go around mutilating statues, or campaigning against this or that cultural relic. There are far greater and more important battles.

In the last ten years we have seen a big expansion in BAME students at our universities; more young black kids excelling in the most challenging subjects at school. The struggle now is to turn that into the universal narrative and the universal expectation – a story of success and not discrimination. That means taking seriously the serious points that are raised by the marchers. It means addressing racism and discrimination, and stamping it out.

But it does not mean wasting time in delectable academic disputation about the life and opinions of every historical personality currently immortalised in bronze or stone.

Let's fight racism, but leave our heritage broadly in peace. If we really want to change it, there are democratic means available in this country – thanks, by the way, to Winston Churchill.

Chancellor visits one of thousands of shops set to open on Monday

News story

The Chancellor Rishi Sunak visited a Waterstones in London to see some of the measures they've put in place to ensure they are ready to welcome customers again.



- the Chancellor visited a Waterstones, one of the thousands of shops opening their doors again
- nearly 7,000 high streets will reawaken on Monday as non-essential retail can open as part of the government's plan to gradually and safely reopen the economy
- non-essential retail employs 1.3 million people and provides £46.6 billion to our economy every year

Together, the non-essential retail sector employs 1.3 million people in high streets up and down the country and provides £46.6 billion to our economy every year. They're able to reopen thanks to the ongoing efforts of people across the country to meet the Five Tests set out by the Prime Minister.

Waterstones is one of the many shops set to open their doors again from Monday provided they follow the COVID-19 secure guidelines, such as limiting the number of customers allowed inside and frequently cleaning objects and surfaces. Waterstones have installed sneeze guards and sanitiser stations, and browsed books will be removed and quarantined. Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

From Monday, shops selling books, clothes, and electronics are able to open for business for the first time in more than two months, as part of our plan to gradually and safely reopen the economy.

There are nearly 7,000 high streets across the country, each

providing a valuable service to their community. They will be vital in helping kickstart the economy as we recover from the virus.

The retail sector employs more people than any other sector in the UK and more than 10 million people live within 200 metres of a high street.

Kate Skipper, Waterstones' Chief Operating Officer said:

We are delighted to be reopening on 15 June as we bring our shops safely out of hibernation. We can't wait to welcome booklovers back to their natural habitat as we return to serving our customers within their communities. Healthy local high streets are vital to communities at all times, providing much-needed services and employment to their neighbourhoods.

New measures will be in place to ensure the safety of our customers and our booksellers but our shops will still be bursting full of interesting books to read. We look forward to seeing you there.

Mike Cherry, Federation of Small Businesses' National Chair said:

As our high streets begin to reopen after this period of crisis, small businesses will be at the very heart of that economic recovery.

Making up 99 per cent of all businesses in the country, small firms are the backbone of the economy and at the heart of the economic recovery in their local communities in the weeks and months to come.

The general public and communities have been fantastic in supporting their local businesses through this difficult time. The reopening of shops is a landmark day, so please do support your local small businesses this week.

Further information

- Pictures from the Chancellor's visit to Waterstones can be found on our [Flickr page](#).
- Businesses should only reopen once they have completed a risk assessment, in consultation with trade union representatives or workers, and are confident they are managing the risks. They must have taken the necessary steps to become COVID-19 secure in line with current Health and Safety legislation.

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