

[News story: Plan to boost social mobility through education](#)

An ambitious plan to provide opportunity on every young person's doorstep and help make Britain a country fit for the future has been unveiled today (Thursday 14 December) by Education Secretary Justine Greening.

In a speech at the inaugural [Reform social mobility conference](#), the Education Secretary pointed to the success of government reforms in raising school standards and creating more opportunities.

This includes 1.9million more children in good and outstanding schools than in 2010, record numbers of young people in education or training and more disadvantaged pupils going to university. And earlier this month [a new study](#) revealed that England is rising up the international literacy league table, with English 9yr olds now significantly better readers than their American, Canadian and Australian counterparts.

But she made clear that if we are to make this a country that truly works for everyone, there is much more to be done to deliver equality of opportunity for every child, regardless of where they live.

The plan [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#) will deliver targeted action where it is needed most, focusing £800 million of government investment on overcoming these challenges.

One overarching ambition will focus on places and communities across the country that feel they have been 'left behind', because they have not yet seen the improvement that other parts of the country have already benefited from. A further four ambitions will cover the key life stages of people's education.

Ambition 1: Closing the word gap

Boosting access to high quality early language and literacy, both in the classroom and at home, ensuring more disadvantaged children leave school having mastered the basic of literacy that many take for granted.

Ambition 2: Closing the attainment gap

Raising standards for every pupil, supporting teachers early in their career as well as getting more great teachers in areas where there remain significant challenges.

Ambition 3: Real choice at post-16

Creating world-class technical education, backed by a half a billion pounds in investment, and increasing the options for all young people regardless of their background.

Ambition 4: Rewarding careers for all

Boosting skills and confidence to make the leap from education into work, raising their career aspirations. Building a new type of partnership with businesses to improve advice, information and experiences for young people.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

In modern Britain, where you are born, where you live, where you go to school and where you work directly affects where you get to in life.

Talent is spread evenly across this country; the problem is that opportunity isn't. We need systemic change and we need everyone – government, employers, education professionals and civil society – to work together so that social mobility runs through everything we all do.

[A recent study](#) has revealed that if disadvantaged pupils in all English regions performed as well as disadvantaged pupils in London, this would lead to an overall economic benefit of around £20 billion in present value terms.

Today's plan focuses government reforms and funding on the people and places that need it most to level up opportunity and ensure no community is left behind, helping to make Britain a success as it prepares for life post-Brexit.

It sets out action and investment in a range of areas including:

- £50million to boost school nursery provision in some of the most challenging areas, so more children benefit from early education support before they arrive at primary school.
- A consultation on proposals to enhance early careers support and professional development for teachers, in particular those working in challenging schools and areas. This will help to further drive up standards in schools by retaining the best teachers and attracting the best individuals to the profession with a 'gold-standard' training and development offer.
- A new £23 million Future Talent Fund to trial a range of new teaching approaches to support the education of the most-able children from less well-off communities.

Sir Peter Lampl, Founder and Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation said:

We welcome today's social mobility action plan. It will play an important role in enabling less advantaged young people to get on in life. We particularly welcome the Future Talent Fund, which will support bright young people to fulfil their potential and the new role for the Education Endowment Foundation to evaluate early years practice.

Melanie Richards, Deputy Chair at KPMG UK said:

We have heard the Secretary of State's call to arms today for all sectors to work together to ensure future generations of young people have the skills, opportunity and support they deserve. We strongly support the Department's Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential action plan; it is the right thing to do for the good of our society and it is also vital if the UK is to remain competitive on the global stage.

It will take the best efforts of all of us – working together – to stamp out the social immobility that currently stops too many people in this country from reaching their full potential.

David Hughes, Chief Executive of Association of Colleges said:

This is an important statement of intent and focus for the DfE. The plan sets out an ambitious agenda to tackle longstanding and deep-seated inequalities which the education system struggles to overcome. It is a brave step to establish this as a goal for the Government and I know that colleges across the country are already working on this ambition in everything that they do. Colleges are drivers of social mobility and will want to work with the Secretary of State to help transform the life chances of children, young people and adults.

The plan builds on wider government work to boost social mobility including the publication of an Industrial Strategy to boost productivity across the UK to create more jobs and increase earning power. In addition, the government has introduced the National Living Wage, investing £9 billion in affordable housing and creating more full-time, permanent jobs.

It will sit alongside work already underway via the [Opportunity Areas](#) programme, and comes after the Education Secretary hosted a [Skills Summit](#) for Britain's top employers at the DfE last month.

Press release: Child maintenance consultation launched

The government is asking for views on options to give the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) stronger compliance, collection and enforcement methods to make sure parents are meeting their responsibilities towards their children.

The Child Maintenance Service was established in 2012 to replace the old Child Support Agency (CSA). Steps have already been taken to strengthen the action taken against parents who don't pay the child maintenance they owe, including consulting on [seizing unpaid maintenance from joint bank accounts](#).

The consultation proposals today include:

- removing passports – parents who persistently do not pay the child maintenance they owe could face being banned from holding or obtaining a UK passport for up to 2 years
- improved calculations – income from capital, foreign income, notional income from assets and unearned income could all be taken into account when the CMS works out how much maintenance a parent owes
- deductions from business accounts – the CMS could seize funds from sole trader and partnership accounts to pay off a parent's unpaid maintenance bill.

The consultation also outlines proposals to address historic unpaid child maintenance built up under the old CSA, and options for writing it off. New analysis shows that it would cost the government £1.5 billion to collect the debt, most of which is owed on CSA cases where the children are now adults.

Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance Caroline Dinenage said:

Our priority is to make sure parents meet their responsibilities to their children so we have been replacing the old CSA – which failed children over the decades – with a new system that is already working better for families. But we need to go further to ensure children get the support they need. That's why we are consulting on a range of options, including tougher powers against parents who do not pay the child maintenance they owe.

The consultation opened on 14 December 2017 and closes on 8 February 2018.

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[News story: Ofqual publishes reports relating to 2017 GCSEs, AS and A levels](#)

Ofqual has today (14 December 2017) published its [review of the 2017 summer exam series](#), during which a range of new GCSEs and A levels were awarded for the first time. This report provides a broad overview of exam planning, exam administration, marking, the awarding process and what happened post-results.

As [shown in our infographic](#), around 14.1 million scripts were generated by approximately 1.4 million candidates this summer. Around 2,200 different GCSE, AS and A level exams were taken and these were marked by approximately 63,000 examiners, leading to 6.6 million certifications.

Overall, GCSE and A level results were stable, and the degree of variation in year-on-year results for individual schools and colleges was similar to previous years. The changes made to special consideration provisions this year ensured that students affected by the tragic events of the summer were treated appropriately.

The vast majority of question papers were, as in previous years, error free. In the small number of cases where serious errors occurred, we monitored the exam boards' handling to make sure, as far as possible, each affected student was given the fairest result. And we launched a review of teacher involvement in developing exam papers given the impact on affected students and public confidence of two well-publicised incidents. We have [issued an update on this work today](#).

Reviews of marking and moderation

We have publishing [official statistics on reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE, AS and A level exams](#) today. This was the second summer when revised, fairer rules applied, such that marks should only be changed to correct a marking error and not because of legitimate differences in opinion between two markers.

Overall, 99% of all AS and A level grades, and 98.6% of all GCSE grades, were unchanged in England this year after the conclusion of any review. The number of grades challenged increased from 346,920 last year, to 369,215 this year (+6%). There were 6.6 million qualification grades issued in 2017. In total, 88,505 GCSE, AS and A level qualification grades were changed, compared to 63,345 grades in 2016. The proportion of all [qualification grades that were changed by 2 or more grades](#) in 2017 was less than 0.03%.

The data indicate that the rise in grades changed after review this year stemmed principally from an increase in the number of successful review requests in new and legacy versions of GCSE English language and English literature. This is partly explained by a significant increase in GCSE entries in these subjects this year, with fewer students taking alternative qualifications. However, the proportion of successful grade changes has also risen.

The evidence from a range of original marking and review of marking data points to variation in some exam boards' efforts to embed the revised rules for reviews, rather than issues with original marking. The data suggests Pearson was more successful than the others at embedding the rules for reviews of marking.

Sally Collier said:

Overall, this year's exams have been carefully planned, effectively managed and successfully delivered by the exam boards. From our initial analysis, it appears that some of the exam boards have not done enough to change old practices and meet our new rules around reviews of marking. We expect all exam boards to comply with our rules at all times. We are currently looking at where more could and should be done and will consider what form of regulatory action may be appropriate. We will not require exam boards to reconsider the outcomes of the reviews they have undertaken this year, so students' awards following review will stand.

Comparability between exam board qualifications and the maintenance of standards over time

A further 3 reports published today cover our work to ensure standards are maintained between exam board qualifications in the same subject, and over time.

Ahead of the summer, we considered [how standards should be maintained in the first awards of new 9 to 1 GCSEs](#), given anticipated changes in cohort entries. We decided that predictions would be based on previous GCSE outcomes only.

After exam papers have been marked, we monitor selected GCSE and A level awards to [ensure that grade standards within subjects are in line across exam boards](#). We found this to be the case in 2017.

And this year we also [looked at the difficulty of the live GCSE maths questions compared with the sample questions](#) that were accredited. Our research indicates that the exam boards produced papers containing questions of similar difficulty to their sample assessment materials and to each other this summer.

National Reference Test

We are also publishing [further details of the first national reference tests in English and maths](#), which were conducted earlier this year. We expect that it will be 2019 at the earliest before exam boards start to use the information from the tests when they award GCSEs. At that point, we will publish the outcomes alongside GCSE results.

National Assessments regulation: annual report 2017

Finally, we are issuing our [annual report on the regulation of national assessments](#). It provides assurance that the Standards and Testing Agency took an appropriate approach to making sure that performance standards were effectively maintained for 2017 key stage tests. We will continue to focus on key aspects of assessment validity and to monitor STA's response to our findings.

[Press release: £1.71m fine for laundry companies found to be market sharing](#)

It follows enforcement action by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) against the companies known today as 'Micronclean Limited' and 'Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited'.

The specialist laundry services they supply include the cleaning of garments worn by people working in 'cleanrooms'. These are highly sanitised environments used by businesses such as pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers as well as NHS pharmacies.

Both businesses had been trading under the 'Micronclean' brand since the

1980s in a longstanding joint venture agreement. In May 2012 the companies entered into new, reciprocal trademark licence arrangements under which they agreed not to compete against each other.

Under the agreement, Micronclean Limited served customers in an area north of a line drawn broadly between London and Anglesey, and Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited served customers located south of that line. The companies also agreed not to compete for certain other customers, irrespective of their location.

Market-sharing arrangements like these are generally illegal under competition law. For customers, these arrangements prevented them from shopping around to get a better deal and that can lead to higher prices, less choice and less innovation in the market.

In reaching its decision, the CMA considered whether the wider joint venture between the companies, including any benefits which flowed from it, meant that these market-sharing arrangements were necessary or justified. The CMA concluded that they were not.

Ann Pope, CMA Senior Director for Antitrust Enforcement, said:

Market-sharing agreements are well established and serious breaches of competition law.

Organisations like the NHS rely on the cleanroom laundry services provided by these companies, but we have found the 2 biggest players were dividing customers between them, leaving those customers with very little choice in service provider.

Companies must regularly check their trading arrangements, including long-running joint ventures and collaborative agreements, to make sure they're not breaking the law. The entry into new trade mark licence agreements in 2012 was an opportunity for the businesses to consider the competition law implications of their commercial arrangements.

Notes to editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
2. The suppliers involved were:
 - Micronclean Limited, known prior to 1 July 2016 as Fenland Laundries Limited (Fenland); and

- Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited, known prior to 15 September 2015 as Micronclean (Newbury) Limited (Berendsen Newbury).
3. The total fine for Micronclean Limited was £510,118. The total fine for Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited was £1,197,956. As the parent company of Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited for the latter part of the period during which the law was broken, Berendsen plc is jointly and severally liable for £1,028,671 of Berendsen Cleanroom Services Limited's fine.
 4. The case concerns the period from signature of the trademark licences on 30 May 2012 until the trademark licences were terminated and the related joint venture was disbanded on 2 February 2016.
 5. The non-confidential decision will be published on the [case page](#) in due course following the redaction of commercially sensitive information.
 6. The case came to the CMA's attention in the context of 2 related merger reviews. The CMA investigated and cleared a [merger between the joint venture](#) vehicle then jointly owned by Fenland and Berendsen Newbury, ie Micronclean Limited (since re-named, as of 1 July 2016, Fenland Laundries Limited), and Guardline Technology Limited. The CMA also investigated a proposed merger between [Fenland and Fishers Cleanroom](#), which was ultimately abandoned.
 7. For more information on how to achieve compliance with competition law, see the CMA's [guidance for businesses](#). The CMA has also produced a series of [animated videos](#) explaining the main principles of competition law and how they affect small businesses.
 8. Any businesses or individuals that have concerns about competition law can contact CMA by email (general.enquiries@cma.gsi.gov.uk) or by phone (020 3738 6000).
 9. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or 020 3738 6633.

[Press release: Welsh Secretary](#)

continues engagement on EU exit in Wales

The UK Government will continue its unprecedented level of engagement on EU Exit in Wales, when the Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns convenes the fourth meeting of his Expert Panel in Cardiff today (Thursday 14 Dec).

Alun Cairns will gather representatives from the business, agriculture and third sectors in Wales at Caspian Point to discuss their priorities for Brexit and to update them on negotiations and the progress of the Withdrawal Bill.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

It is vital that we have open and honest conversations about what Wales – and the UK as a whole – should look like after our exit from the European Union. This includes discussing the challenges that we may face along the way, and the opportunities that await us at the finish line.

That is why I am working with an Expert Panel of stakeholders to examine the implications of EU exit for Wales across all sectors.

As we proceed through the negotiations we will go on hearing from these important partners, to ensure that our discussions are informed by the views of every region of the UK, and each sector of our economy.

The Withdrawal Bill is a key piece of legislation in the national interest which will convert EU law to UK law on exit day, ensuring we leave the EU with certainty, continuity and control. The Bill is expected to complete Commons committee stage before Christmas.

The Secretary of State for Wales established the Expert Panel to work with him to deliver a smooth and orderly exit from the EU in Wales. The fourth meeting today builds on the constructive conversations they have already had, helping to contribute to the UK's negotiating position.