

News story: PM celebrates UK-Japan Season of Culture

The Prime Minister has announced today in Tokyo that a UK Season of Culture will take place in Japan between 2019 and 2020, bringing together British and Japanese artists, technology experts, researchers and business, to spur on modernisation and inspire a new generation of innovators.

The season, run by the British Council, will provide UK artists and their Japanese partners with opportunities to share state-of-the-art digital technology, including virtual reality and robotics, and will showcase the best of UK and Japanese creativity in the run-up to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics.

In parallel with the UK Season of Culture, Japan will hold a series of cultural events in the UK.

The Prime Minister has also warmly welcomed the proposal by the Japan-Britain Society to plant cherry blossom trees in the UK as a symbol of the friendship between Japan and the UK. In 1912, the Japanese government gifted 3000 cherry blossoms to Washington DC, and the rash of pink blossoms along the Tidal Basin is now a significant feature of Washington's springtime, and a permanent reminder of US ties with Japan. The aim is for the UK-Japan relationship to be similarly celebrated, and the UK and Japan will now work closely together to develop the proposal.

Tomorrow in Tokyo, as the Prime Minister concludes her visit to Japan, she will attend a reception at the British Ambassador's Residence to celebrate the close connections between the UK and Japan in the fields of culture and the arts, sport and innovation.

The Prime Minister said:

Next year, we will celebrate 160 years of diplomatic relations between the UK and Japan. This important anniversary is a chance to forge new creative partnerships for the future.

And so I am delighted that 2018 will see the opening of a new Japan House in London, to promote Japanese culture in the UK even more widely, and that in 2019 as the Rugby World Cup begins, the British Council will begin a season promoting British culture here in Japan – bringing together artists, technologists, researchers and businesses.

Our two great countries have a natural cultural and artistic affinity, and I look forward to our partnership in these creative areas continuing to blossom.

News story: UK steps up commitment to countering Daesh

44 additional Royal Engineers will deploy to Al Asad Airbase in August, increasing the UK footprint there to over 300 and bringing the total number of British troops in Iraq to over 600. The additional personnel will construct a camp of 80 housing units, a squadron headquarters and offices, freeing up coalition personnel to support counter-Daesh operations in the wider region.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

We are stepping up our contribution to the fight against Daesh and fulfilling Britain's role as a key player in the global coalition.

Daesh is being defeated. Iraqi forces, backed by coalition airstrikes, have now liberated 70% of the territory Daesh held and the victims of its barbarism are being helped by our humanitarian support. These extra troops will help support operations to bring the defeat of Daesh a step closer.

The troops from 5 Armoured Engineer Squadron, 22 Engineer Regiment in Tidworth, are held at readiness for just such a task. They will be deployed to Iraq for around six months and have been tasked with constructing infrastructure including accommodation and offices in the coalition camp.

The deployment will increase the number of UK personnel currently supporting the multinational effort against Daesh to over 600. They are primarily involved in training Iraqi security forces in battle winning infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical skills, with over 58,000 Iraqis trained so far. In addition to personnel on the ground in Iraq, RAF aircraft have carried out around 1400 strikes against Daesh from their base in Akrotiri, Cyprus.

Press release: Poultry keepers urged to take action now to prepare for

winter Avian Flu threat

All poultry keepers across the UK are being urged to remain vigilant to the threat of bird flu and take action now to reduce the risk to their flocks and the wider poultry industry this winter in a joint call from the Chief Vets of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the UK.

Simple measures can help to keep flocks disease free. All keepers – whether they run a large commercial farm or keep just a few pet chickens in their back garden – can get ahead of the game and take these simple steps to reduce the risk of disease before autumn migration of ducks and geese begins again this winter:

- Keep the area where birds live clean and tidy, control rats and mice and regularly disinfect any hard surfaces. Clean footwear before and after visits.
- Place birds' food and water in fully enclosed areas that are protected from wild birds, and remove any spilled feed regularly.
- Put fencing around outdoor areas where birds are allowed and limit their access to ponds or areas visited by wild waterfowl.
- In Great Britain, stay alert by signing up online to a free service to receive text or email alerts on any outbreaks of bird flu in the UK. You can also quickly and easily register your flock online. In Northern Ireland, visit the DAERA website for further information.

Last winter, the H5N8 strain of bird flu was found in 13 kept flocks in the UK – ranging in size from as few as nine to as many as 65,000 birds. We have seen a decline in the number of new cases over the summer, but the disease is still circulating in kept poultry across Europe, with Italy the most recent country to suffer a series of outbreaks. It has also recently been confirmed in a dead mute swan in Norfolk.

Government is working with groups including NFUs in England and Scotland, the UFU, RSPCA, British Hen Welfare Trust and Poultry Club of Great Britain to highlight the importance of keeping up high biosecurity even though the immediate disease risk has dropped.

Together, the groups are also keen to highlight the impact of bird flu on the poultry industry – a case in a backyard flock leads to the same trade restrictions in an area as an outbreak on a commercial farm, so protecting chickens in a back garden from the disease also protects farmers locally and nationally.

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer, Nigel Gibbens, said:

While it is undoubtedly good news we haven't confirmed a case in kept birds in the UK for two months, the disease remains a threat – particularly as we move again towards the colder months.

For that reason we cannot afford to rest on our laurels and I want to remind keepers of flocks large and small to do everything they can to reduce the risk to their birds.

Simple actions you can take now, such as regularly cleaning and disinfecting the area where you keep your birds and signing up for free disease alerts, could really help to reduce the risk of your birds becoming infected this winter.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop said:

While I am sure this lack of new outbreaks will be welcomed by poultry and other captive bird keepers of both large and small flocks I would remind everyone it is vital they continue to be vigilant for signs of disease and maintain excellent biosecurity practices.

If you are concerned about the health of your birds you should seek advice from your veterinary surgeon and if you suspect that your birds have AI, you should report it to your local Animal and Plant Health Agency office.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland, Sheila Voas, said:

Given the constant risk of bird flu in the UK from wild birds, I would urge bird keepers to take some simple actions now to help reduce the chance of their birds becoming infected. These could include steps to reduce contact with wild birds, particularly on ponds and other water bodies.

One of the main challenges government faced during last year's avian influenza outbreak was being able to contact bird keepers with small numbers of birds. To stay up to date with the latest situation I would encourage bird keepers – including those who are already on the GB Poultry Register – to sign up for the Animal and Plant Health Agency free text alerts service.

Northern Ireland's Chief Veterinary Officer, Robert Huey, said:

While I welcome the lack of new outbreaks across the UK, the risk of avian influenza remains a real and constant threat. That is why

it is essential that bird keepers maintain effective biosecurity all year round, not only when a prevention zone is in place.

Poultry and other bird keepers in Northern Ireland are also reminded that their birds must be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. This will ensure they can be contacted quickly in an avian disease outbreak, enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity.

Given the recent outbreaks in wild birds in Norfolk and on the continent, there is every likelihood the disease will return this winter. Last year's outbreak is believed to have been transmitted via migratory wild birds, which means keepers need to be aware of the danger of contact between wild and kept birds and take action now.

All keepers in Great Britain can stay up to date with the latest situation by [signing up for the Animal and Plant Health Agency's free alerts service](#).

1. [A cross-Government and industry poster outlining biosecurity advice can be downloaded from GOV.UK](#).
2. Avian flu has been confirmed in [13 kept flocks and over 40 wild birds](#) between December 2016 and July 2017.
3. For more advice and regular updates on the latest situation, visit Governments' avian flu pages: in [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [NI](#)
4. In GB, you need to [register if you keep more than 50 birds](#).
5. In Northern Ireland if you keep any birds, other than pet birds kept in the owner's home, you need to [make sure they are registered](#).
6. For more information about this press release, please contact the Defra press office on 020 8225 7318.

Press release: Courts issue £177,720 in penalties to anglers

The Environment Agency revealed it prosecuted 691 people for angling offences throughout April, May and June 2017. In total, courts imposed penalties of

£177,720, with the highest being £974. Some 314 offenders received penalties of over £300, ten times the price of a year's legal fishing.

The most common offence was fishing without a valid licence, which could see offenders landing fines of up to £2,500 and a criminal conviction. Other offences included removing coarse fish contrary to national byelaws put in place to protect fish stocks. During the restricted period the Environment Agency carried out 17,589 fishing licence checks and issued 963 offence reports.

Kevin Austin, our new Deputy Director for Fisheries at the Environment Agency said:

The Environment Agency and its partners take unlicensed angling very seriously. While only a minority of anglers seek to evade the law and do not buy a licence if only 5% of anglers didn't buy a £30 annual licence this would represent a loss of around £1.5m to the sport and to the environment.

Anyone fishing without a licence can expect to be prosecuted, fined and face having a criminal conviction. Obtaining a fishing licence is easier than ever and costs from just £30 for the year and remember that the junior licence is now free – there is no excuse.

Anyone who suspects illegal fishing to be taking place should report the matter to the Environment Agency's incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Press release: CMA makes switching easier for 700,000 UK energy customers

New CMA measures will help 700,000 restricted meter customers, including around 400,000 in Scotland, to switch without changing their meter.

This follows an extensive investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into the energy sector, which found that around two thirds of restricted meter customers could save an average of £154 per year by switching energy tariff.

In the past, the cost and hassle of changing their meter could have proved a major barrier for many of these people to switch to a cheaper deal. However, the CMA's new measures mean that restricted meter customers can now more easily access a wide range of different deals and rates.

The CMA is also demanding that suppliers offer:

- reminders about switching, via bills,
- contact details for Citizens Advice or Citizens Advice Scotland (as appropriate), and
- further information to assist them with switching (eg their total consumption, their consumption levels by register, their meter type, their current tariff type).

To help people with restricted meters to get the best deal on their energy, the CMA has made the additional recommendation that Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland become recognised providers of information and support to these customers. Both agencies have now confirmed that they will implement this recommendation.

CMA Director of Remedies Susannah Meeke said:

We want to help as many people as possible to shop around for the best energy deal for them. But, many people on restricted meters have effectively been prevented from doing this because they would need to change their meter – which is both costly and a hassle.

Now they will be able to switch like any other energy customer – and potentially lower their bill by up to £154 a year.

We welcome the fact that Citizens Advice is now offering additional information and support for these customers to help them explore their options.

Notes for 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 more information on the CMA see our [homepage](#) or follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
2. Restricted meters are those which apply different rates across different times of the day. Examples of affected energy customers include those with Economy 10 and THTC meters.
3. Suppliers with fewer than 50,000 customers do not have to accept restricted meter customers, although they may choose to do so. A large majority of suppliers have more than 50,000 customers.
4. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or call: 07774 134814