

[News story: Childcare service opens for parents with children under five](#)

Parents with a child under five years old can now apply for a 30 hours free childcare place for September 2017.

The new 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents of three and four-year-olds in England doubles the current 15 hours of free childcare currently available to all parents, offering a total saving for eligible working families of up to £5,000 a year.

For parents across the UK, Tax-Free Childcare will cut childcare costs by up to £2,000 per year for each child under 12 years old, or £4,000 per year for disabled children under 17 years old. Parents with a child born on or after 1 April 2013 can now apply for Tax-Free Childcare. All eligible parents will be able to apply for Tax-Free Childcare by the end of 2017.

The government's total childcare offer is backed by a record investment of more than £6 billion per year by 2020, supporting working families and those on low incomes.

Eligible parents can apply for both 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare via the government's online childcare service. They can apply for all of their children once their youngest child qualifies, avoiding the need to provide the same information twice and saving them valuable time.

The service initially opened to parents with children under the age of four, and disabled children under 17, in April 2017 and more than 140,000 parents have already successfully applied through the service.

Parents can access the Childcare Choices website, www.childcarechoices.gov.uk, to see what childcare offers they could be eligible for. The Childcare Choices website includes a [Childcare Calculator](#) for parents to compare all the government's childcare offers and check what works best for their families.

The site also enables parents to pre-register for email alerts that will notify them when they can apply, as well as providing details of existing government childcare offers.

[News story: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon](#)

visits Ghana

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Foreign Office Minister for the Commonwealth and the United Nations travelled to Ghana for the first time in his new role to reaffirm the importance of Ghanaian-UK relations, and reenergise the Commonwealth, ahead of the Commonwealth Summit meeting in April. This follows the Foreign Secretary's visit to the country in March.

While there, Lord Ahmad met President Akufo-Addo to discuss Ghana's place as a beacon of democracy and stability in the region and its role in strengthening Commonwealth values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Lord Ahmad discussed boosting Commonwealth trade links with the Minister of Trade. Trade between Commonwealth states is estimated to currently be over \$680 billion and is forecast to grow to \$1 trillion by 2020.

These figures show the scale of what is happening within the Commonwealth today in terms of trade, investment and the jobs.

The Minister also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Security, and the Minister of Gender.

Young people's hearts and minds are vital to the future of the Commonwealth. Of the nearly 2.4 billion people that live in Commonwealth countries, 60 per cent are under 30. Lord Ahmad reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring that all Commonwealth citizens have a voice in shaping the future and direction of the institution by meeting Chevening Scholars and recipients of the Queens Leadership and International Leaders award.

Lord Ahmad also paid a visit to the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, where he set out the UK's vision for the future of peacekeeping and UN reform. The Minister also met with victims of child trafficking and heard from NGOs that are tackling this abhorrent practice.

After the visit, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

I was delighted to meet President Akufo-Addo, some of his key Ministers and Ghanaians from all walks of life to discuss how we can strengthen the Commonwealth's focus on promoting democratic values, development, security and prosperity.

Ghana is our historic ally, being the first African member-state to join the Commonwealth family in 1957 after its independence. And most importantly, we see Ghana as one of our closest partners who can help us renew the Commonwealth for this and for future generations.

The Commonwealth Summit next year presents a unique opportunity to re-energise and re-shape the Commonwealth to ensure that it remains

more relevant than ever in the 21st century.

Background

The Commonwealth is home to a third of the world's population, many of its fastest growing economies, and half of the globe's top 20 emerging cities; intra-Commonwealth trade is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2020; and it provides us with a unique network of common language and laws.

The Commonwealth Summit will be hosted the week of 16th April 2018, immediately following the closing of the Commonwealth Games in Queensland, with venues including: St James's Palace, Lancaster House, Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Further information

[News story: Ambition for vast majority of students to study core academic GCSEs](#)

On Wednesday (19 July) [ministers set out an ambition](#) for 90% of year 10 pupils to start to study the full suite of EBacc GCSEs by 2025, and 75% of year 10 pupils starting to study this combination of subjects by 2022.

The EBacc subjects – which are made up of English, Maths, a foreign language, history or geography and sciences – are those which, at A level, open more doors to more degrees, according to the Russell Group.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

Pupils, whatever their background, have the right to study a core academic curriculum that provides them with the knowledge and skills for a variety of careers beyond the age of 16.

As we look increasingly outwards as a country, this is more important than ever, and the EBacc ambition will ensure our pupils are able to compete with educational high performers in a global economy.

Alongside the EBacc, the arts are a crucial part of a broad and balanced curriculum and it is great to see that the best schools ensure young people have the option to study both academic and creative subjects.

The Department for Education reconfirmed the ambition in its response to the public consultation on the implementation of the EBacc.

The government has also published [further analysis on trends in arts subjects](#) in schools where EBacc entry has increased. The analysis shows the proportion of pupils entering at least one arts subject has slightly increased since the EBacc was introduced, but at school-level there was a small positive correlation, suggesting schools where EBacc entry has increased tend to have also seen an increasing arts uptake.

Responses to the consultation also raised some concern about the teachers required to meet the EBacc ambition. The government recognises the challenge some schools face in recruiting high-quality modern foreign languages (MFL) teachers and has various schemes in place to support schools.

Mark Lehain, Parents and Teachers for Excellence and Principal at Bedford Free School said:

This announcement has been well trailed so will not come as a surprise to anyone in secondary education, nor should it be opposed.

Every child deserves a broad, rich curriculum throughout their school years, and the vast majority of schools already ensure they get this. While some may wish to debate exactly what subjects should count within the suite, we already know from looking at great schools that there is plenty of time available in a student's timetable to cover EBacc combinations and leave time to study other subjects, including the arts and technology.

Head teachers and the wider system as a whole have got plenty of time to work up to the target, and ensure that there are sufficient subject specialists, funding, and provision to deliver it.

At PTE we welcome this focus on providing a rigorous academic, knowledge-rich curriculum for as many students as possible.

Hywel Jones, Head Teacher at West London Free School said:

It is vital that pupils of all abilities have access and an entitlement to traditional subjects that build a wider knowledge of the sciences, arts and the humanities.

Dr Jo Saxton, CEO of Turner Schools said:

The EBacc is an enabling foundation upon which a future of choices, be they vocational, technical or academic, is built. It is a really powerful driver of social justice.

Libby Nicholas, CEO of Astrea Academy Trust said:

We welcome today's announcement and the rigour and high expectations that EBacc brings, whilst recognising the importance of music, drama and the arts for every child.

Press release: Major expansion of HMIC to take on inspection of fire and rescue in England

- significant new role for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to support government's fire reform programme
- HMIC to become single inspectorate for policing and fire, with recommendation to Her Majesty the Queen that Sir Thomas Winsor be appointed as chief fire and rescue inspector for England
- inspectorate will support the continuous improvement of fire and rescue authorities

Today (Wednesday, 19 July) the Home Office has agreed that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) undergoes a major expansion to take on the role of inspectorate of fire and rescue authorities in England.

The inspectorate will help support the continuous improvement of this critical public service and support fire and rescue authorities to become even more effective. It will also support continuing collaboration between policing and fire and rescue services, offering the opportunity for future inspections of joint areas of work or where support functions have been combined.

HMIC will be renamed Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Nick Hurd, Minister for Policing and the Fire Service said:

The response to the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy has highlighted the professionalism, dedication and skill of our firefighters.

Creating an inspectorate for fire and rescue authorities in England will support the continuous improvement of this critical public service to make sure that services are as professional, effective and as efficient as possible. It will also ensure where problems are identified, actions can be taken by the fire and rescue authorities to overcome them.

HMIC has been inspecting police forces for more than 160 years and has a strong track record in holding policing to the highest standards. I am confident that they too will hold fire and rescue services to the highest standards possible.

The inspectorate will consider how efficient and effective fire and rescue authorities are; will highlight good practice and identify areas where they need to improve, so that action can be taken to overcome them. This will include how services prevent and respond to incidents; whether the service provides value for money as well as reviewing the service's leadership, training, diversity, values and culture. It replaces the current system of peer review where fire and rescue services inspect one another.

The Home Secretary has recommended to Her Majesty the Queen that she appoints Sir Thomas Winsor, currently Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, as Chief Fire and Rescue Inspector for England, and HMIC's existing inspectors be appointed Inspectors of Fire and Rescue Authorities. These appointments will be in addition to their existing police inspection responsibilities.

Sir Thomas Winsor, said:

HMICFRS will approach the inspection of fire and rescue services – establishing and reporting on their efficiency and effectiveness – with the same degree of thoroughness as it inspects the police.

My fellow HM Inspectors and I look forward to engaging with fire and rescue authorities, and others with a stake in their performance, to build a sound and productive relationship which serves the public well.

The first inspection is expected to take place next spring with every authority in England inspected by the end of 2019. HMIC will shortly begin work developing an inspection framework and programme to be published for consultation in the autumn.

The introduction of an independent inspectorate is just part of the government's fire reform programme which aims to make fire and rescue services more effective, efficient and professional than ever before. Other key elements include:

- the formation of a professional standards body for fire and rescue which will build a comprehensive professional framework of standards
- strengthening local fire and rescue governance by enabling police and crime commissioners to take on the responsibility for local fire and rescue services where a local case is made to maximize the benefits of collaboration
- reform of the workforce so that it is highly skilled, modern, flexible and diverse
- creating a new national website which will hold a range of information

to increase transparency of fire and rescue services by allowing the public to access the performance of their local service as well as information about chief officer pay, expenditure, accounts and efficiency plans

- the publication of incident level data from the Incident Recording System so that the public can have access to the raw data of fire incidents across England
- driving efficiencies across services including supporting them in their commercial transformation.

Statement to Parliament: Conflict, Stability and Security Fund 2016 to 2017 and settlement for 2017 to 2018: written ministerial statement

I wish to update the House on how the Government has been supporting our national security interests through conflict prevention, peace building, stabilisation, peacekeeping and conflict resolution using the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

Details of the programmes funded by the CSSF and its impact so far are in the first [Annual Report](#), a copy of which has been placed in the library of the House. The publication of this first report reflects the Government's commitment to transparency in the delivery of Official Development Assistance. We will be updating GOV.UK pages with more information on the CSSF and individual programmes.

The CSSF replaced the Conflict Pool in April 2015, as part of a new, more strategic approach to enhancing the delivery of our national security interests directed by the National Security Council (NSC).

As announced in the [2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review \(SDSR\)](#), CSSF funding has continued to increase and will be £1.162 billion in 2017 to 2018. The CSSF is now one of the world's largest mechanisms for addressing conflict and instability. Its programmes deliver against more than 40 cross government strategies set by the National Security Council (NSC). These help to secure the UK, promote peace and stability overseas and contribute directly to SDSR objectives.

Parliamentary accountability for taxpayers' money spent via the CSSF is provided primarily through the Joint Committee for the National Security Strategy (JCNSS). The JCNSS concluded its first inquiry into the CSSF in February. We have responded to the inquiry report and are taking forward many of their recommendations. Further announcements on governance will be made in

due course.

Meeting both our legal and policy gender commitments is central to the delivery of the CSSF. Last year the CSSF spent £214.5 million on programmes which addressed gender equality. For example the CSSF in the Democratic Republic of Congo supported the provision of free legal assistance to 269 victims of international war crimes, of which 179 were women, mostly victims of sexual violence.

In addition to supporting peace building activity, CSSF funding is strengthening the multilateral system, supporting the UN and other international organisations to develop more effective multilateral responses to instability. The CSSF funds our contributions (known as assessed costs) to the UN peacekeeping budget. We are the sixth biggest contributor, spending over £300 million in 2016 to 2017. In addition, we have been using CSSF funds to help reform the UN and UN peacekeeping, coordinating outreach to Member States to secure pledges of personnel for peace operations and to assist with the transition from pledges to deployments. In 2016 to 2017 the CSSF provided a further £15 million to fund the doubling of the UK's troop contribution to peacekeeping through 2 new deployments: 70 UK military personnel to support UNSOS in Somalia, which provides essential logistical support for the African Union Mission (AMISOM) that is combating the terrorist organisation Al Shabaab; and 370 UK military personnel to provide engineering and medical support to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

To address some of the JCNSS recommendations for the CSSF a rapid review is being undertaken of Cross-Whitehall Fund governance and structures.

Conflict, Stability and Security Fund resources, financial year 2017 to 2018

CSSF	2017/18 (millions)
Peacekeeping & Multilateral	391.7
Regional/Country Strategies	606.3
Security & Defence	150
Delivery Support, including the Stabilisation Unit & National School of Government	14.5
Total	1162.5