

[News story: New market-leading bond launches today](#)

This new product gives people access to a market-leading rate of 2.2% for between £100 and £3000 of their savings.

In a move to support savers who have been affected by low interest rates, the Chancellor announced the market-leading product at [Autumn Statement 2016](#). The rate of 2.2%, fixed for three years, was confirmed at last month's Budget.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby said:

From raising the ISA threshold to introducing the new Lifetime ISA, this government is committed to creating a nation of savers.

With its market-leading rate of 2.2%, the investment bond will provide a valuable boost for savers who have been affected by low interest rates.

With the average 3 year fixed term product having a rate of 1.24%, the new offering is significantly higher than others currently on the market.

In the decade before 2009, the average 1-year fixed term savings rate was 5.0%. But since then the average has been 1.9%, and is currently 0.6%.

The product is provided by [NS&I](#), one of the largest savings organisations in the UK with 25 million customers, and is available to those aged 16 and over.

It can only be purchased online to give customers a simple way to apply for the bond and to manage their investment. This also reflects the changing nature of customer behaviour as more money is deposited online with NS&I than via any other individual sales channels.

The new [NS&I product](#) comes on top of other actions the government has taken to support savers, including increasing the ISA allowance to £20,000, introducing a new personal savings allowance that means that 98% of adults pay no savings tax and launching the Lifetime ISA to help younger people buy their first home and save for later in life.

[News story: CMA accepts](#)

Mastercard/VocaLink undertakings

The CMA has today accepted undertakings offered by Mastercard to address competition concerns arising from its purchase of VocaLink.

On 18 January 2017, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) [announced it would look in detail](#) at whether the undertakings offered by Mastercard UK Holdco Limited, an affiliate of MasterCard International Incorporated (Mastercard), and VocaLink Holdings Ltd (VocaLink) removed the need to carry out an in-depth merger investigation.

The package of measures offered by Mastercard and VocaLink consisted of:

- VocaLink making its existing network connectivity available to a new supplier of infrastructure services to LINK. This could allow a competitor to use VocaLink's connectivity to members of the LINK ATM network, rather than having to build their own;
- VocaLink transferring to LINK the intellectual property rights relating to the LINK LIS5 messaging standard, which members of the network use to communicate when customers use cash machines; and
- Mastercard contributing to the cost to LINK members of changing to a new supplier of infrastructure services to LINK.

After considering responses to a [formal consultation](#), the CMA has concluded the proposals are sufficient to address its competition concerns.

The undertakings and all other information relating to this merger investigation will shortly be available on the [case page](#).

Press release: Families to benefit from £55 million boost to childcare schemes

Thousands of new childcare places for working parents around the country are being created thanks to a multi-million grant scheme, the Early Years Minister Caroline Dinenage has announced today.

The £50 million capital grants double the government's investment to help nurseries, pre-schools and playgroups invest in new buildings and upgrade facilities. This will deliver more than 9,000 additional childcare places – helping to meet the government's commitment to give working families 30 hours free childcare from September.

The money builds on the £50 million funding announced in January, doubling the total spend to £100 million and altogether providing nearly 18,000 extra childcare places.

Alongside this, nearly £5 million will go to organisations that are helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs to access high-quality early education, so that every child can reach their full potential, regardless of their background.

The 12 opportunity areas announced by the Education Secretary will also benefit from £5 million as part of the government's latest capital investment. These areas, identified as social mobility 'coldspots', are already benefitting from a share of £72 million – today's funding will be a further boost for families living there.

As part of its [Plan for Britain](#), the government is working to create a society where success is defined by work and talent, not birth or circumstance. Supporting parents with the cost and availability of quality childcare to enable them to work if they choose to is an important part of this ambition.

Minister for the Early Years Caroline Dinenage said:

In my visits around the country I have heard from families whose lives have been improved by access to 30 hours. As part of our Plan for Britain we want to make this a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few, so that means removing the barriers facing parents struggling to balance their jobs with the cost of childcare.

This investment will deliver more childcare places to working parents, giving them the benefits of 30 hours' free childcare while giving their children high-quality early education that sets them up for life. This is backed by our record £6 billion investment in childcare per year by 2020.

Up to £5 million of voluntary and community sector (VCS) grants will be shared among 13 projects working to improve the quality of early education and supporting professionals to deliver the 30 hours offer. This includes:

- more than £1.5 million for 5 organisations working with parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), delivering workshops and training that will raise awareness of the support available for these families
- nearly £1.7 million to directly support disadvantaged children by

boosting outreach programmes in areas such as early literacy and home learning

- more than £1 million to groups working directly with providers, developing tools and resources to support the delivery of 30 hours

The government has also relaunched its [Childcare Business Grant Scheme](#), aimed at supporting new childminders or childminder agencies who are looking to start their own businesses. Eligible professionals could receive grants of £500 or £1,000 to help with the costs of setting up, making it easier for those who want to offer 30 hours free childcare to prepare.

Childminders will also benefit from grants to Action for Children and PACEY, worth £370,000 and £381,000, which will help upskill and empower them to deliver 30 hours and make sure their businesses are sustainable.

The announcement is on top of the government's record £6 billion each year investment for childcare by 2020 and follows the recent publication of a [new fairer funding system](#) for early years education. This formula will see the minimum hourly rate for councils increased to £4.30 per hour, ensuring the 30 hours free offer is sustainable for providers.

The government has recently launched its [Childcare Choices website](#). This sets out details of all of the childcare support available for parents from across the government and allows them to register for email alerts that will notify them when applications for 30 hours open nationally.

[Opportunity areas](#) will see local partnerships formed with early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, charities and local authorities to ensure all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Opportunity areas include:

- Blackpool
- Bradford
- Derby
- Doncaster
- Fenland & East Cambridgeshire
- Hastings
- Ipswich
- Norwich
- Oldham
- Scarborough
- West Somerset

The priority of the council bid round, which closed in August, was to target grants to areas where there was a demonstrable need for additional places to support the delivery of the 30 hours offer. Each bidder was required to contribute at least 25% of the total funding they requested, in order to share the budget around the maximum possible projects around the country.

The capital grants are being matched by around £40 million in additional funding from various local sources across the country, resulting in a total investment of approximately £140 million.

We are providing tools to support childcare providers, including a package of [30 hours delivery resources](#) and an updated [business sustainability toolkit](#).

Successful bids for VCS grants were required to demonstrate they met specific priorities: their positive impact on disadvantaged communities – including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or ethnic minorities – distinct ways of enhancing the quality of the early years workforce, or helping to boost the number of 30 hours places available. The grants run over 15 months to March 2018.

[Press release: PM call with US President Trump: 10 April 2017](#)

Theresa May tonight spoke with US President Trump to discuss last week's chemical weapons attack in Syria and the US response.

The President thanked the Prime Minister for her support in the wake of last week's US military action against the Assad regime.

The Prime Minister and the President agreed that a window of opportunity now exists in which to persuade Russia that its alliance with Assad is no longer in its strategic interest.

They agreed that US Secretary of State Tillerson's visit to Moscow this week provides an opportunity to make progress towards a solution which will deliver a lasting political settlement.

They also discussed the broader Middle East, including the threat posed by Iran throughout the region.

The Prime Minister and President also stressed the importance of the international community, including China, putting pressure on North Korea to constrain the threat it poses.

[Speech: Science and Innovation – Impact of the Newton-Picarte Fund in Chile](#)

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate the impact of the Newton-Picarte

fund in Chile and the contribution of the British Council.

The Newton Fund was created by the UK Government in 2014. A total of £735m has been invested by the Government to work with 15 countries up until 2021. In South America our partner countries are Chile, Brazil, Mexico and Colombia. The objective of the fund is to encourage science and innovation collaboration between the UK and developing economies, supporting their socio-economic development. The Newton Fund is part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA). A key characteristic of the fund, which distinguishes it from other UK Government ODA funding, is that partner countries provide match funding, thereby creating a partnership in which both countries are investing equal resources.

Since its official in-country launch in August 2014, through the signing of the MOU between Minister Céspedes and myself, representing the Ministry of Economy and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy respectively, I am pleased to say that the Newton-Picarte Fund has helped to firmly position the UK as one of Chile's leading science and innovation partners.

Through the Newton-Picarte fund in Chile we have been able to finance collaboration across the scientific spectrum with programmes in key sectors such as agriculture, engineering, natural and social sciences and medical and health research – in total more than 200 initiatives. More importantly the fund has been the vehicle through which UK and Chilean researchers and universities have been able to establish partnerships, which we hope will continue for the long term.

The great success of the Newton fund can largely be attributed to the excellent work carried out by the British and Chilean Delivery Partners, who jointly have been in charge of designing, implementing and managing the programmes. The British Council, due to its presence in Chile, has been one of our closest allies in strengthening Chile's scientific and innovative excellence, developing advanced human capital, mobility and networking, through programmes such as Institutional Skills Development and the Communication Skills Workshop.

Chile is expected to graduate from the OECD DAC list of ODA recipient countries this year, with retrospective effect from 1 January 2017, after exceeding the high income country threshold in 2012 and 2013. Consequently the priorities and objectives of the UK-Chile Newton partnership will change to focus on global development challenges and those facing other developing countries, as opposed to Chile's own development challenges.

This year we will launch four activities which reflect this new focus – broadening the impact of joint British and Chilean research to benefit developing countries. These will be the final bilateral Newton programmes, which we will launch in Chile. In future years Chile will continue to be involved in regional Newton fund programmes, one of which we hope to launch this year on biodiversity. Please do ask our Embassy science team, Francisco and Alvaro, as well as British Council colleagues, if you would like more information.

Chile is a part of the Science and Innovation Network (UK SINet) of the UK Government. UKSINet is a network of around 90 officers in more than 30 countries in the world, that build links and collaborations in science and innovation in each country. Francisco is in charge of leading this work here in Chile, which reflects the importance that the UK Government places on our relations with Chile in science and innovation.

The Newton Picarte fund has enabled the UK to develop a relationship with Chile which is delivering significant impact. We are grateful to the British Council and to all of you for your help in making the fund such a success and we look forward to building on that success with you in the future. Because science and innovation is important for our economies, our societies and for the world.