

Prime Minister to revolutionise skills and training opportunities

The government's new legislative programme will be unveiled in the Queen's Speech today.

Landmark reforms will support the nation's recovery from the pandemic, building on the progress made so far to level up the country and ensure equal opportunities for all.

The Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee will be a central part of the Queen's Speech. New laws will create a post-16 and adult education and training system that is fit for the future, providing the skills that people need for well-paid jobs and opportunities to train throughout their lifetime.

The legislative measures include:

- enabling a new student finance system to transform the current student loans system, which will give every adult access to a flexible loan for higher-level education and training at university or college, useable at any point in their lives
- employers will have a statutory role in planning publicly-funded training programmes with education providers, through a "Skills Accelerator" programme
- the Secretary of State for Education will be given more powers to intervene in colleges that fail to meet local needs, and to direct structural change where needed to ensure the provider improves.

These build on the extensive action already underway to revolutionise the skills and training offer across the country, including the introduction of new T Level courses and access to free, job-relevant "bootcamp" courses.

The Prime Minister outlined his vision for a radical change in skills provision in a speech last year. He made clear that the 50 per cent of young people who do not go to university have been historically deprived of the chance to find their vocation and develop a fulfilling, well-paid career.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

These new laws are the rocket fuel that we need to level up this country and ensure equal opportunities for all. We know that having the right skills and training is the route to better, well-paid jobs.

I'm revolutionising the system so we can move past the outdated notion that there is only one route up the career ladder, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to retrain or upskill at any point in their lives.

The government will introduce the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill on 18 May to deliver the Prime Minister's vision. The Bill forms the legislative underpinning for the bold reforms set out in the Skills White Paper.

The challenges of the last year highlight the need to rethink and rebuild, bringing our skills and education system closer to the employer market and widening the opportunities that are available for all as we build back better from the pandemic. A third of working-age undergraduates are not in highly skilled employment, and in 2019 employers were unable to fill a quarter of their vacancies due to a lack of employees with the right skills.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

As we rebuild from the pandemic, we've put reforming post-16 education and skills at the heart of our plans to build back better, and as Education Secretary I have championed the often forgotten 50 per cent of young people who don't go to university.

Through legislation, our vision is to transform the sector and expand opportunity right across the country, so that more people can get the skills they need to get good jobs.

Our universities and colleges must be far more accessible to adults and part-timers, allowing people to change careers, upskill regularly, and stay up to date with changing knowledge and technologies. These reforms will enable people to learn, train or retrain and access new or updated skills at any time in their lives from age 16.

The Lifelong Loan Entitlement will comprehensively reform the way student finance is structured. As set out by the Prime Minister last year, the loan will give all individuals access to the equivalent of 4 years of student loans for higher-level study. The loans can be used flexibly across their lifetime, full-time or part-time, for modules or full qualifications, for high-quality technical qualifications and academic education.

The restructured skills system will put local employers at the centre of skills provision, through a 'Skills Accelerator programme.' The programme will build stronger partnerships between employers and their local Further Education colleges, or other local training providers, ensuring that provision meets local needs in sectors including construction, digital, clean energy and manufacturing.

The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill will provide these reforms with the statutory footing that they need, to introduce new opportunities for everyone aged over 16, up and down the country.

New policies and funding programmes are already in place to ensure adults have greater access to local, free, job-relevant courses. Intensive 'bootcamps' offer training in areas such as coding and 'green' retrofitting in construction, as well as longer, qualification-based courses in areas including engineering, accountancy and construction. Bootcamps have already

trained 3,000 people, with 14,000 more signed up to attend courses this year.

T Levels were introduced last year. Equivalent to three A-levels, they have been co-created with over 250 employers so students can get the right skills and experience, and businesses have the workforce that they need for the future.

Almost 400 free courses are also now available to adults without a full qualification at Level 3, ranging from engineering to healthcare to conservation and backed by £95 million in government funding.

Work is also ongoing with businesses of all sizes to support them to offer more, high-quality apprenticeship opportunities. To help with this, the government is offering cash incentives for employers of £3,000 for each new apprentice they take on until the end of September.

Seeking justice and supporting victims of Daesh atrocities

Excellencies, I'd like to start by thanking Special Advisor Karim Khan for his report on the continued progress made by The UN Investigative Team for the Accountability of Daesh in the recent months. We commend UNITAD for its continued flexibility, including in the face of COVID-19 challenges, and applaud the progress to complete initial case-briefs on two core investigative priorities. And we welcome the launch of the Inter-Faith Dialogue series; close engagement with religious communities is critical to achieving justice.

But the Special Advisor's report and Nadia Murad's report left us in no doubt of the criminality of Daesh and the harrowing suffering of the victims – of children and women, for generations to come, across communities, whether they remain in ISIS captivity or if they have secured their freedom. So the international community must stand united in its resolve to hold Daesh to account and uphold justice. The United Kingdom has supported the Investigative Team to fulfil its mandate and we welcome the support of other countries to UNITAD. That is why the UK provided assistance to UNITAD's investigations into crimes committed against the Kaka'i, Shabak and Shia Turkmen. Indeed, we commend the Team's work in this regard, and note it has tripled the total number of incidents identified as relevant to these investigations, thanks to close collaboration with civil society, academics, and community leaders.

The UK also notes and welcomes the continued collaboration between the Team, the Iraqi judicial authorities, and the Governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. We welcome progress made in building evidence of Daesh atrocities. This is an important step forward in progressing UNITAD's mandate

and securing justice for victims.

We welcome progress on draft legislation to provide the domestic legal basis for the prosecution of ISIL members for international crimes in Iraq. But given the importance of seeing justice done, we urge continued momentum and collaboration to secure an evidence sharing mechanism that provides assurances on the use of the death penalty.

Justice also means assisting the victims of Daesh to rebuild their lives. The work of the Team's Witness Protection and Support Unit to provide psychosocial support to witnesses, particularly women and child survivors, is crucial. And again, we are especially grateful to Nobel Laureate Nadia Murad for her work, for her briefing today, but above all, for her courage in turning her own harrowing experience and suffering to the benefit and service of others.

The United Kingdom has so far contributed nearly \$2.8 million to the work of the UN Investigative Team. We continue to engage in New York, London, Baghdad and Erbil. Regular updates to the UN Security Council are key to allowing us to see the progress the Team is making. We welcome the Team's continued engagement with us at the United Nations and with individual member states who are providing staffing, funding and support.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity officially to note the UK's thanks and appreciation for the work of the Special Advisor and for all he has done over the last three years, in this, his last Council briefing.

Thank you, Mr President.

COP26 President welcomes Vatican's support to highlight faith leaders' role on climate action

Press release

Alok Sharma highlights four COP26 goals on visit to Vatican City



UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

- Alok Sharma, COP26 President-Designate meets with senior Holy See officials, including Cardinal Parolin
- Faith and religious leaders have a key role on tackling climate change and helping protect the most vulnerable communities
- COP26 Faith and Science event in Rome in the autumn was discussed

COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma, completed a visit this morning to the Vatican during which he welcomed the continued support from the Holy See on climate action as we move towards the COP26 climate conference in November.

Mr Sharma met with Vatican officials, including His Eminence, Cardinal Parolin. In addition to discussing the steps the Vatican State has taken itself to reduce its emissions, Mr Sharma highlighted the four COP26 goals: limiting warming to 1.5 degrees, adapting to protect communities and natural habitats, mobilising climate finance and working together to accelerate action.

All faiths have an important role to play on climate change, leading by example and mobilising people of faith to take action. Pope Francis committed the Vatican City State to net zero by 2050 at the Climate Ambition Summit last December.

Speaking after his visit Mr Sharma said:

A cross-society approach is essential if we are to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of keeping global warming to less than 1.5 degrees alive.

Faith leaders are an integral part of this approach and I was honoured to visit Vatican City to discuss this.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, has committed the Vatican State to a net zero future and I hope his leadership and moral standing across the world will set a powerful example to others.

A Faith and Science: Towards COP26 event will be held in Rome in the autumn and as part of his visit, Mr Sharma was able to look forward to the event and discuss the mobilising of leaders from the world's major faiths to build momentum ahead of COP26.

Ends.

Notes to editors:

- The COP26 President Designate visited the Vatican on Monday, 10 May, before moving on to an official visit to Italy.
- Following his visits to the Vatican and Italy, he will now fly to Spain.
- The Faith and Science: Towards COP26 event will see religious leaders and scientists meeting in Rome in autumn 2021, in partnership with the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See and the British Embassy to the Holy See.
- The meeting will take place after the preparatory COP26 events in Milan: the world conference dedicated to young people “Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition” and the Pre-COP26 (28 September to 2 October 2021).
- In preparation for the Faith and Science event, the British and Italian Embassies, together with the Holy See, are convening a series of virtual meetings. The first one took place on 4 February.
- Follow [@UKinHolySee](#) [@ItalytoHolySee](#) [@WiltonPark](#) for updates. Updated information can also be found on [Wilton Park website](#).

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[More restrictions eased for care homes](#)

- Care home residents will be allowed 5 named visitors from Monday 17 May, up from 2 currently
- Self-isolation no longer required following visits to GPs, dentists and day centres
- Visits will only pause for a minimum of 14 days rather than 28 days following an outbreak

As part of step 3 of the roadmap, the number of named family members or friends able to visit their loved ones in care homes will be increased from 2 to 5, as the visiting restrictions continue to ease. A maximum of 2 visitors will be allowed at any one time or on any given day.

This follows a reduction in COVID-19 cases and the ongoing successful vaccine rollout with 95% of older care home residents receiving their first jab.

Residents will also be able to go to medical appointments, a workplace, educational setting and day centres without having to self-isolate on their

return.

Minister for Care, Helen Whately said:

The measures we have taken during this pandemic have always been to protect our most vulnerable, but I have heard first-hand from those living and working in care homes how difficult the restrictions have been.

Thanks to the phenomenal success of the vaccine rollout and a reduction in cases across the country, I am pleased we can now take another step towards getting back to normal, while protecting those in care homes from the continued risk of COVID-19.

The new guidance allows more family and friends to reunite and reduces the need to self-isolate, which I know many have found incredibly challenging. As we turn the tide on this cruel virus I want to make visiting as normal as possible by the summer, and this is an important step on that path.

The period when a COVID-19 outbreak in a care home can be declared over will also change from 28 days to 14 days after the last positive case assuming there are no Variants of Concern (VOCs) identified.

This means visits can resume sooner following an outbreak, once the relevant testing has been completed and provided all staff and residents tested receive a negative result.

Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care, Professor Deborah Sturdy said:

The pandemic has been so difficult for those living in care homes and our social care workforce have done a brilliant job of keeping their residents safe and supported. I know this change to the guidance will be a huge boost to so many, giving more people the chance to reunite with more of their friends and family.

Chair of the Social Care COVID-19 Taskforce, Sir David Pearson said:

I would like to thank all our social care workers for their efforts during the last very difficult year, and for having the vaccine and supporting those they care for to get vaccinated.

This is a significant step on the road to normality for so many. We are only able to increase visits in and out of care homes thanks to the hard work of social care staff maintaining good infection prevention and control, and the effect of the vaccines in driving down transmission.

The government announced an interim change in guidance last week to allow low-risk outdoor visits out, such as a trip to the park, a garden or the beach, without the need to isolate afterwards.

Thanks to the success of the vaccination roll out and the reducing level of infection across the country, the government is able to keep this guidance under review with a view to removing further restrictions as soon as possible.

Updated guidance will be published in due course.

Residents can now be visited by 5 named visitors (including their essential care giver if they have one), with a maximum of 2 visitors at any one time or on a given day. These daily limits do not apply for very young children or essential care givers.

Visits out of the care home will be planned in consultation with the family and care home managers, subject to testing requirements and risk assessments to protect residents.

Activities outside of the care home that will not require self-isolation include:

- outdoor visits to parks, beaches or gardens
- medical appointments
- visiting day centres
- attending educational settings
- going to work

Recovery testing will take place 14 days after the last positive result in an outbreak, rather than 28 days, except where the outbreak included evidence of VOCs. Where all the recovery testing showed negative results the restrictions on visits would be removed.

Face coverings no longer required in schools and colleges from 17 May

Pupils will no longer be required to wear face coverings in schools and colleges from 17 May, the Prime Minister has confirmed.

In a press conference this afternoon, the Prime Minister announced that the country's roadmap out of lockdown is on track and Step 3 will go ahead as planned on 17 May.

The latest data shows infection rates continuing to decrease, deaths and hospitalisations at their lowest level since July, and the vaccine rollout

continuing at pace.

In line with this data, pupils will no longer be required to wear face coverings in the classroom or communal areas in schools and colleges. This will improve interaction between teachers and students, ensuring the clearest possible communication to support learning.

Transmission of the virus in schools continues to decrease in line with wider community transmission, with the latest statistics showing a significant drop in the number of teachers and staff testing positive.

The decision has taken into consideration the latest scientific evidence, medical advice and stakeholder feedback on the impacts of wearing face coverings in schools and colleges.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Step three of the roadmap allows people to mix indoors once again and in line with the latest data, we no longer need to recommend that face coverings are worn in the classroom.

Over the past year we have always put the wellbeing of pupils and staff first, and this step is now the right one, as vaccinations protect the most vulnerable in society and we turn our attention to building back better from the pandemic.

Testing in schools and colleges continues to be important, so I urge all students, families and teachers to keep testing themselves twice weekly, to help reduce the risk of transmission.

John Simpson, Head of Public Health Advice, Guidance and Expertise Pillar (PHAGE) at Public Health England, said:

Scientific studies show that COVID-19 transmission in schools remains low.

This evidence has been reviewed alongside criteria for the wider easing of restrictions.

It's important to strike a balance between COVID-19 protection and student wellbeing and the guidance on face coverings for secondary school pupils has been kept under constant review.

Existing control measures in schools including good ventilation, handwashing, social distancing where possible and twice weekly testing remain hugely important.

Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza, said:

The reopening of schools for all children has been so important and a real success, and I have been pleased to see so many children return to the classroom.

I am glad that the government has made the decision to remove face coverings in schools for pupils, based on the latest scientific advice. Wearing a mask during lessons has been one of many sacrifices children have made over the last year in our fight against the pandemic and I know they will welcome this latest step towards a return to normal school life.

The recommendation to wear face coverings in classrooms was introduced as a precautionary, temporary measure at a time where rates of coronavirus were high in the community, the school and college regular testing regime was about to begin, and the vaccine programme was in its early stages.

All other protective measures such as ventilation and social distancing where possible will remain in place and regular rapid testing will continue to help find and isolate asymptomatic cases when they do occur.

Staff are not required to wear face coverings in the classroom but should continue to wear them in communal areas such as the staff room, where social distancing may not be possible.

Today's updated guidance on how schools should operate from Step 3 of the roadmap also confirms that from 17 May, new residential educational visits can take place within the UK.

The Department recommends schools and colleges do not plan for international visits to take place up to and including 5 September, recognising the logistical difficulties that will remain in place this academic year regarding overseas travel with groups of children. The position beyond 5 September will be reviewed in advance of Step 4.

All measures in place for schools and colleges are kept under review based on the latest scientific and medical advice.

ENDS