

Consultation launched to create new flexible apprenticeships

Sectors including the creative, agriculture and construction industries will soon be able to offer more flexible apprenticeship opportunities.

A consultation has launched today (Tuesday 20 April), seeking views on how new flexi-job apprenticeship schemes could be run. Apprenticeships are at least 12 months long, so some sectors with flexible employment patterns and short-term roles, such as agriculture, construction and creative sectors including TV, film and theatre production, have found it challenging to create enough opportunities.

Announced by the Chancellor at Budget, the new flexi-job apprenticeship schemes would enable an apprentice to work across a range of projects and with different employers to gain the full skills and experience they need to complete their programme. This could include film, TV and theatre production, with one apprentice now being able to work on different productions during their apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships are a vital part of the further education offer, ensuring people have the skills they need to get the jobs they want. Today's consultation will extend this offer further, opening up even more careers to apprentices as we build back better from the pandemic.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

No matter where in the country you are from, we want everyone to be able to get the experience and knowledge they need to get the job they want, while making sure employers have the talented workforce they need.

Our flexi-job apprenticeships will boost opportunities in sectors like the creative industries where employment is often flexible or short term – creating even more chances for people to experience the life changing opportunity an apprenticeship can bring as we build back better from the pandemic.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

We know apprenticeships work – which is why they're a central plank of our Plan for Jobs.

The new flexi-job scheme will create more opportunities for apprentices across England, giving them the hope, skills and experience to progress their career and drive our recovery from the pandemic.

Tim Davie CBE, Director-General of the BBC, said:

I believe flexible apprenticeship schemes are critical for the future of our industry. Apprenticeships not only grow our skills base and expertise, but open up the industry to people from a wide range of backgrounds. That's great for our industry and great for mobility. Everybody wins.

Stephen Page, Executive Chair at Faber & Faber, said:

The Creative Industries Council is pleased with the ongoing discussions with DfE over finding and implementing flexibilities to the Apprenticeship Levy, to enable our dynamic sector to engage with the vital Apprenticeship programme. This consultation on portable and flexi-apprenticeships is a welcome part of that process, and we would urge interested parties across the Creative Industries Sector to respond and help guide this next step in the process.

In July employers will be invited to bid for a share of a £7 million fund to create and test new flexi-apprenticeships schemes, with the first approved flexi-job apprenticeships expected to start in January 2022.

The consultation builds on the reforms set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper, which will put employers at the heart of plans to make sure people have the skills they need to get the jobs they want.

This will be further supported through a new Skills Accelerator programme. Launched by the Education Secretary, the programme will help build stronger partnerships between local employer groups, such as Chambers of Commerce, colleges and other providers to make sure communities are getting the training needed to meet local skills gaps. Those interested will have access to a £65 million fund to develop and deliver plans in pilot areas in 2021-22.

Alongside today's flexi-job apprenticeship consultation and new Skills Accelerator, work is ongoing with businesses of all sizes to support them to offer more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities, so employers and individuals can access the skills they need to succeed and help the country to build back better from the pandemic. To help with this, the government is already offering cash incentives for employers of £3,000 for each new apprentice they take on until the end of September.

Notes to editors:

- The flexi-job apprenticeship consultation will run for six weeks, closing on 1 June, and is seeking views from employers, apprentices, sector bodies and existing apprenticeship training agencies.
- The flexi-job apprenticeship schemes will build on the Apprenticeship Training Agency model, allowing employers to join forces and access

funding to create new or expand existing schemes to boost the use of apprenticeships in sectors with non-traditional employment patterns.

- DfE will launch the flexi-job apprenticeships fund in July 2021. At that time, we will set out further details (informed by today's consultation) and invite organisations and employers to submit bids for the £7m fund. The fund will make £7m available across 2021-22 and 2022-23, which was first announced by the Chancellor in the Budget.

[New major study shows importance of nature in hitting net zero](#)

Researchers from Natural England have developed a picture of the impact that different UK habitats can have in taking carbon out of the atmosphere and helping us hit net zero by 2050, whilst delivering for both biodiversity and conservation.

In the most comprehensive [report](#) to date on the impact of the nation's landscape on carbon storage and sequestration, researchers found that peatlands and native woodlands are habitats which have the greatest capacity to store carbon, but that many others, including coastal and marine habitats such as saltmarsh and sea grass meadows have a significant role to play a role in helping the UK hit net zero by 2050.

The report also highlights the importance of protecting traditionally managed habitats such as hedgerows, hay meadows, heathlands and old orchards as a way of preserving carbon stocks and wildlife that may have taken centuries to develop. There are also good opportunities to create new patches of habitat and hedgerows within farmed landscapes for biodiversity and carbon storage.

Future environmental land management schemes for farmers and land managers will reward farmers for the creation and maintenance of habitats, such as native woodlands and peatlands, with the Landscape Recovery scheme being designed to incentivise major land management changes and habitat restoration within our wooded and peatland areas across England.

The study looked at a wide range of the UK's natural habitats, finding that:

- Woodlands have high rates of carbon sequestration – depending on the species, age and location. New native woodlands can support biodiversity at the same time as taking up carbon. Old woodlands can become substantial carbon stores, with a hectare of native woodland sequestering the equivalent CO₂ each year as flying London to Rome 13 times.
- Saltmarshes can be highly effective carbon stores, as well as helping coasts adapt to future climate change. Restoration of sea grass meadows also has potential to capture carbon from the atmosphere in its

vegetation, and also trap carbon from elsewhere in sediments. One hectare of saltmarsh each year buries the carbon equivalent of an average car's annual carbon emissions.

- Orchards and hedgerows are effective at storing significant amounts of carbon but generally cover a smaller area than other habitats and are cut regularly, limiting the amount of carbon gain. Their sensitive management, however, can increase carbon storage whilst providing benefits for wildlife and the cultural heritage in farmed landscapes.
- Peatlands are the largest carbon stores. When in a healthy condition they soak up carbon slowly but can go on doing so indefinitely. Peatland soils can be over 10 metres deep, holding huge carbon stocks that have developed over many millennia. Carbon held in the deep peat soils of fens and raised bogs hold eight times as much carbon as the equivalent area of tropical rainforest.
- Heathlands and grasslands store more carbon than modern agricultural landscapes but less than peatlands, saltmarsh and old woodlands. Protecting these old, established habitats is important for biodiversity, as well the carbon stocks they hold, as both may have taken centuries to accumulate.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

This research reveals the fundamental importance of conserving and enhancing our natural environment in meeting the climate change challenge. Taking carbon out of the atmosphere to be stored in ecosystems, including woods, peatlands and salt marshes, is a vital part of our journey to net zero, and if done in an integrated manner will help meet our ambitions for nature recovery and also climate change adaptation, such as reducing the risk of flooding.

By combining different policies and strategies on land and at sea, then major climate related benefits can be achieved. Woodland creation incentives, peatland recovery, action on farms, renaturalisation of the coast and landscape-scale nature recovery projects can all contribute. The climate change and nature emergencies are two sides of the same coin and with this kind of information the UK can lead in showing how we can go low carbon and high nature at the same time.

Dr Ruth Gregg, Senior Specialist for Climate Change at Natural England, and lead author of the report, said:

Our natural and wild places will play a crucial role in tackling the climate crisis. This study gives the most complete picture of the impact of habitats around us in delivering carbon storage and sequestration. As well as highlighting the well-known importance of carbon stores such as peatland and woodland, we now have a much better understanding of the full impact of other habitats such as hedgerows and saltmarshes, and how we should manage these going

forward.

Not only do our habitats capture carbon, but they provide many other benefits for biodiversity and the wellbeing of society. For habitat creation and restoration to achieve its full potential in helping the UK achieve net zero by 2050 we need to act now, basing decisions on robust science and taking a strategic approach. This report will support Natural England, the government, and environmental organisations across the country to do just that.

Darren Moorcroft, CEO, Woodland Trust said:

The Woodland Trust's State of Woods and Trees 2021 report provided new evidence for the substantial levels of carbon held in ancient woods, storing 36% of total UK woodland carbon, despite comprising only 25% of all woodland.

These carbon stores are expected to double over the next 100 years, demonstrating the importance of protecting and restoring these irreplaceable habitats. Acknowledging the significance of native woodlands and other valuable habitats as natural solutions to climate change and nature recovery is vital for tackling the climate crisis and we welcome this contribution from Natural England to the growing evidence base.

The research will provide an invaluable resource for government as part of its upcoming action plan for trees and woodlands, alongside a package of measures to promote the restoration of peatlands. It will also help environmental groups, local authorities and land managers as they work together to deliver biodiversity benefits and help the UK achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, while increasing the economic benefits for society through nature, as recently set out in the Dasgupta Review.

[New laws to wipe out rural mobile 'not spots' and speed up rollout of next-generation 5G technology](#)

- Measures to eliminate mobile signal blindspots in rural areas and on roads
- Changes to planning laws will create huge opportunities for rural economy and unlock potential of 5G to improve lives
- Reforms will protect countryside and reduce the number of new rural

masts needed

- Comes as Telecoms Diversification Taskforce publishes report on 5G supply chain

The government is proposing law changes to boost ongoing efforts to improve connectivity for people who live, work and travel in rural areas.

The reforms will remove one of the biggest barriers to better coverage in the countryside by reducing build time and costs for new infrastructure while protecting rural areas by minimising any visual impact.

Under the proposals, mobile companies will be allowed to make new and existing masts up to five metres taller and two metres wider than current rules permit. This will increase the range of masts and allow operators to fit more equipment on them so they can be more easily shared.

The move will turbocharge the delivery of the £1 billion Shared Rural Network being built to eliminate 4G mobile 'not spots' in the countryside and will speed up rollout of next-generation 5G networks.

It will incentivise mobile firms to focus on improving existing masts over building new ones, with fewer new masts needed for rural communities to get a better signal now and to take full advantage of future 5G-connected technology. This includes innovations in remote healthcare, self-driving vehicles and smart devices such as fridges, TVs and heating systems.

Stricter rules will apply in protected areas, including national parks, the Broads, conservation areas, areas of outstanding natural beauty and world heritage sites.

The plans also include proposals to bring better mobile coverage for road users by allowing building-based masts to be placed nearer to highways.

The news comes as industry experts and academics set out recommendations on how to reduce the UK's reliance on a small number of equipment vendors in the telecoms supply chain.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

We want to level up the country and end the plague of patchy and poor mobile signals in rural communities.

Today we are setting out plans to make it easier for mobile firms to transform connectivity in the countryside and propel villages and towns out of the digital dark ages – providing a welcome boost for millions of families, businesses and visitors.

These practical changes strike a careful balance between removing unnecessary barriers holding back better coverage, while making sure we protect our precious landscape.

Most new masts will still need to be approved by local authorities, which will have a say on where they are placed and their appearance. Robust conditions and limits will remain in place to make sure communities and stakeholders are properly consulted and the environment is protected.

Hamish MacLeod, Director of Mobile UK, said:

We welcome the proposals set out in this consultation which will provide better certainty and flexibility to technological changes required to build world-class mobile networks. We urge the Government that to assist mobile companies to meet its ambitious targets for deployment, it brings about legislative change as quickly as possible.

A joint [technical consultation](#) between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has been published today with details of the changes. It follows an [earlier consultation](#) in 2019 on the principle of the reforms.

The consultation seeks views on reforms to permitted development rights in England:

- Existing mobile masts to be strengthened without prior approval, so that they can be upgraded for 5G and shared between mobile operators. This would allow increases to the width of existing masts by up to either 50% or two metres (whichever is greatest), and in unprotected areas allow increases in height up to a maximum of 25 metres (previously 20 metres). Greater increases will also be permitted subject to approval by the local authority.
- New masts to be built up to five metres higher – meaning a maximum of 30 metres in unprotected areas and 25 metres in protected areas, subject to approval by the planning authority.
- Greater freedoms for slimline ‘monopole’ masts up to 15 metres in height, which are less visually intrusive than standard masts and used for 5G rollout, in unprotected areas. This could mean operators notifying local authorities of their intention to proceed without needing prior approval. This would align it with current rights that telecoms operators have for telegraph poles.
- Building-based masts to be placed nearer to highways to bring better mobile coverage to road networks, subject to prior approval, and in unprotected areas smaller building-based masts to be permitted without prior approval.

- Cabinets containing radio equipment to be deployed alongside masts without prior approval and to allow greater flexibility for installing cabinets in existing compounds – fenced-off sites containing masts and other communications equipment – to support new 5G networks.

DCMS will also lead on a new code of practice for mobile network operators. This will provide updated guidance on how operators and local authorities can work together to build communications infrastructure the country needs. It will also contain best practice for the siting of new infrastructure, particularly in protected areas, and ensuring stakeholders are properly consulted.

The consultation will run for eight weeks and closes on 14 June 2021.

Telecoms Diversification Taskforce – final report

Led by former BT boss Lord Livingston of Parkhead, the Telecoms Diversification Taskforce was set up by the government to provide independent advice on how to boost competition and innovation in the UK telecoms market and build an open, sustainable and diverse supply chain.

It follows the government's decision to remove Huawei equipment from UK 5G networks by 2027. While necessary to protect national security, it means the UK will be reliant on only two other 5G equipment suppliers: Nokia and Ericsson.

The [taskforce's report](#) will support the government as it delivers its £250 million [Diversification Strategy](#), mitigating the resilience risks to 5G networks ahead of the 2027 deadline so people can have confidence accessing the economic and social benefits brought by 5G. It recommends:

- Working through telecoms standards-setting bodies to encourage best practice in security and open networks;
- Creating the right environment for diversification through policy interventions – for example, setting out a timetable for the winding down of 2G and 3G networks to support the entry of new vendors into the UK market;
- Identifying interventions and investment to accelerate the development and adoption of Open Radio Access Network technology, including setting up a fund for developing new products and ensuring testing facilities such as the UK Telecoms Lab and SONIC meet industry needs;
- Identifying opportunities to invest in long-term research and innovation to build UK capability for current and future generations of telecoms technology.

Now the taskforce has completed its work, the government will study the findings and respond fully in due course.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

Our £250 million strategy will unleash a wave of innovation across

the UK and make sure companies have a wide range of revolutionary 5G technology to choose from that is trusted and secure.

I welcome today's report from the Telecoms Diversification Taskforce. It will be instrumental in helping us prepare our networks for next-generation mobile technologies. We will now consider its recommendations and respond in due course.

Lord Livingston of Parkhead, Chair of the Taskforce, said:

It has been a privilege to lead the Taskforce and help drive forward the government's important work to diversify the telecoms supply chain and reduce reliance on high-risk vendors.

The government's Diversification Strategy set out a clear ambition and the Taskforce has suggested concrete actions and policy recommendations to help it meet its aims.

The UK now has the opportunity to create a more diverse network and be an international leader in the adoption of next-generation network technology. This will present substantial opportunities for UK based suppliers and users alike.

I would like to thank all of the Taskforce, made up of an outstanding team of experts from industry and academia, for their commitment and expertise in producing this report.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Shared Rural Network

- The [government announced](#) on 9 March 2020 that it had agreed a £1 billion deal with the four Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) for a shared network of new and existing phone masts in partial not spots (areas where there is currently coverage from at least one, but not all operators) and total not spots (areas where there is currently no coverage from any operator). We are already starting to see improvements as a result of the SRN programme:
- Devauden in Wales became the first rural community to benefit from the programme, when a mast went live in the village on 17 June 2020. This was followed by Longnor in the Peak District on 23 July.
- On 27 January 2021, the operators O2, Three and Vodafone announced a new joint venture to build and share 222 new mobile masts to boost rural coverage across the United Kingdom and deliver the first stage of the SRN. This programme of investment will increase coverage in each of the UK nations – 124 new sites will be built in Scotland, 33 in Wales, 11 in Northern Ireland, and 54 in England, with each operator leading on 74 of the new sites.

- On 23 February 2021 EE announced it will upgrade more than 500 4G sites in 2021 as part of the SRN to extend coverage in rural areas across the UK. This will include 333 in England, 132 in Scotland, 76 in Wales, and 38 in Northern Ireland.
-

Strengthening confidence-building and dialogue mechanisms between regional and sub-regional organisations

Thank you, Secretary-General Guterres and Mr Ban and all of the briefers for the poignant reminders of the challenges we collectively face.

As we all recognise, conflict has a devastating impact. We know it hits hardest amongst the poorest and indeed the most vulnerable.

By the World Bank's reckoning, by 2030, two thirds of the world's extreme poor could be affected by a fragility, conflict and violence.

The Council's agenda, sadly, is a tragic testimony. In the last two weeks alone, we have discussed conflicts in Yemen, in Mali, in Syria and the Great Lakes region, amongst others.

So, Mr President, we welcome the adoption today of a presidential statement under your leadership. We hope it will serve to strengthen confidence-building measures and, indeed, dialogue mechanisms with the regional, sub-regional and importantly, civil society organisations on whom peace processes so deeply depend.

I would like to highlight three ways that we believe we can strengthen the vital role of these organisations.

First, regional and sub-regional organisations can restore trust between conflict-affected communities. In particular, the work of the OSCE High Commissioner on national minorities has reduced tensions and prevented conflict across the OSCE region. As regional organisations develop their technical capacity, they should seek to follow this very example. And we should seek to boost their willingness to use confidence-building measures as and when it's required.

Secondly, confidence-building and dialogue must be absolutely part of a broader strategy coordinated through the good offices of the United Nations.

We recognise the unique role of ASEAN of addressing the crisis in Myanmar. The UK further welcomes ASEAN's readiness to support positive and constructive efforts. And therefore we look forward to the close UN-ASEAN

cooperation to solve the conflict and serve those who are suffering, those who are in need.

We also applaud the 2017 United Nations African Union Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. This was indeed instrumental in the 2019 peace agreement between the Government of the Central African Republic and 14 armed groups. And we call upon all political actors to remain committed directly to it.

Thirdly, regional bodies need to include civil society organisations in a meaningful capacity at all levels of dialogue. If we are truly to build inclusive and enduring peace, civil society bodies should be – have to be – pivotal in all aspects of conflict prevention and importantly, also in conflict resolution.

As has been said by others, including my good friend, the Foreign Minister of Ireland, it's important that women are central to peacemaking. In particular, regional women's networks, such as ASEAN Women for Peace Registry and the African Union's FEMWISE Africa, are vital actors in the pursuit of a lasting and sustainable peace.

The United Kingdom, I assure you, is absolutely committed to protecting and promoting women peace builders, and we are proud to have supported the International Civil Society Action Network's Protection Framework. I urge others to support and implement its expert and effective recommendations.

On our shared path to peace, we need this more open and inclusive approach for a stronger and more coherent international response. The nature of conflict has changed. Increasingly, we see conflicts that are intrastate in nature, which have the potential to destabilise peace and security on a global level. We also see how marginalisation and human rights violations can totally and utterly isolate communities and indeed perpetrate violence.

To tackle these conflicts' driving forces, we must and we need to combine our humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. The Peacebuilding Commission is absolutely at the heart of this, and we commend the Peacebuilding Fund's support, which builds trust amongst communities, because ultimately, where national and regional efforts fail, it is the Security Council that has primary responsibility for both international peace and international security.

We do that best when we have a clear view. The United Kingdom supports regular and coordinated early warning capabilities, which help the Council to prevent escalation. Regional organisations can strengthen that capability by sharing early warning assessments and bringing emerging situations to the Council's direct attention. Accurate and timely information needs to be coupled with effective early engagement and support at community, state, regional or continental level.

And where prevention activities fail, or there is no regional consensus, it is this Council that should lead the international community not just to discuss, to debate, but to act. The United Kingdom stands ready to support

regional and subregional organisations as they continue to strengthen the confidence building and dialogue efforts.

It is only by mobilising all the tools at our collective disposal, Mr President, that we can avoid the escalation of violence and secure the lasting, sustainable peace that we all desire.

Thank you, Mr President.

10 million people receive second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

- More than 10 million people in the UK vaccinated with a second dose of a COVID-19 jab
- Almost one in five adults in the UK have now received both doses
- People urged to take up their second doses to maximise protection

Over 10 million people in the UK have received their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Health services across the UK have now administered a total of 43,084,487 million vaccines between 8 December and 18 April, including 32,932,448 million people with their first dose and 10,152,039 million with their second.

The milestone means over 19% of all UK adults have received both vaccines.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Vaccines offer us the best possible protection from the virus, so it is fantastic that 10 million people have now received their second dose.

This is another remarkable milestone in our vaccination programme, which has already saved thousands of lives.

I want to thank the brilliant staff and volunteers involved in the rollout, and urge all those who are called to keep coming forward.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This is another terrific milestone, meaning over ten million people who are the most vulnerable to COVID in the UK now have double protection from this awful virus.

Second doses are crucial to maximising the strength and duration of your protection from COVID-19 and I'm urging everybody eligible to get their jab as soon as possible.

This milestone is thanks to the dedication and tireless efforts of our NHS workers, volunteers, civil servants and everybody working on the frontline to save lives and stop this virus in its tracks.

The government has already hit its target of offering everybody in cohorts 1 to 9 – those aged 50 and over, the clinically vulnerable and health and social care workers – a first dose of the vaccine by 15 April and remains on track to offer a jab to all adults by the end of July.

Vaccine Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

Vaccines have already saved more than 10,000 lives and they are the best way to protect you and your loved ones from this dreadful disease.

We want to send this virus into retreat. No matter who you are, where you live, your race or your religion, I encourage everyone to get both doses when offered and help this country return life to normal.

All vaccines being used in the UK have undergone robust clinical trials and have met the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's strict standards of safety, effectiveness and quality. Rolling reviews are underway by the MHRA to assess the Janssen and Novavax vaccines.

The speed and breadth of the UK vaccination programme means even more people will soon develop strong protection from serious illness from COVID-19 infection, saving countless lives and significantly reducing pressure on the NHS.

Data from Public Health England's real-world study shows the vaccines are already having a significant impact in the UK, reducing hospitalisations and deaths, saving more than 10,000 lives between December and March.

Approved vaccines are available from thousands of NHS vaccine centres, GP practices and pharmacies. Around 98% of people live within 10 miles of a vaccination centre in England and vaccinations are taking place at sites

including mosques, community centres and football stadiums.

Background information

The latest UK-wide vaccination statistics are published [here](#).

PHE's real-world data on the efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines is available [here](#).

Through the government's Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 457 million doses of eight of the most promising vaccine candidates, including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer for 40 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses
- Moderna for 17 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses
- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Valneva for 100 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- CureVac for 50 million doses

To date, the government has invested over £300 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine to enable a rapid roll out.

The UK government is committed to supporting equitable access to vaccines worldwide. The UK is the largest donor to the COVAX facility, the global mechanism to help developing countries access a coronavirus vaccine, and has committed £548 million in UK aid to help distribute 1.3 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines to 92 developing countries this year.