

# Recruitment campaign launches for inaugural Chair of new environment watchdog

News story

The successful candidate will oversee the work of the new Office for Environmental Protection.



The independent body will monitor progress towards improving the natural environment and investigate potential breaches of environmental law.

The recruitment campaign for the inaugural Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has begun today (Monday, 10 August).

The successful candidate will be the driving force behind the new green governance body – which will independently scrutinise and advise the government to ensure it sets and meets ambitious targets to improve our environment. It will also have the power to run its own independent investigations and enforce environmental law.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Protecting and enhancing our natural environment is a greater priority than ever before, so it is essential both present and future governments are held to account on our environmental targets.

This new and independent body needs a strong leader who has the passion and commitment needed to deliver real and lasting change for our precious environment, and I encourage all those who fit the bill to apply.

The Office for Environmental Protection will monitor the government's

progress towards improving the natural environment and will investigate complaints regarding failures of public bodies to comply with environmental law.

This body will be legislated for through our [landmark Environment Bill](#), which will enshrine environmental principles into law and introduce measures to improve air and water quality, tackle plastic pollution and restore habitats so plants and wildlife can thrive.

The legislation is currently passing through Parliament, with the watchdog scheduled for creation in 2021, subject to the Bill gaining Royal Assent.

Further information about the vacancy and how to apply can be [found on the Cabinet Office Public Appointments website](#).

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## [The UK and TCELS to jointly support COVID-19 research in Thailand](#)

The UK Government, through the British Embassy Bangkok, and the Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences (TCELS, under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation) have today agreed to share knowledge, technology, experience and business information, and to support the research in health and medicines.

TCELS CEO Dr. Nares Damrongchai signed a memorandum of understanding which states that the two organisations will give financial support to the Mahidol-Oxford Research Unit, Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University, to conduct 2 research projects: i) the implementation of RT-LAMP technology and genome evolution analysis for 2019-nCov; and ii) the development of a spatiotemporal surveillance platform with interactive user interface for real-time evaluation of the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Thailand.

The expected outputs of the projects are RT-LAMP emergency test kit for COVID-19 which have been tested and ready for mass production, and the surveillance platform for COVID-19 transmission monitoring that fits for the current situation in Thailand. The platform will be used to evaluate the disease control policy in real time, building Thailand's preparedness should there be a new wave of transmission. Both projects will be conducted by researchers from the Mahidol-Oxford Research Unit which is a collaboration between the UK's Oxford University and Thailand's Mahidol University.

The MOU is the first one between the British Embassy Bangkok and TCELS which will lead to further collaborations on genomic studies. This is a significant

step that builds on prior medical research collaborations that the UK and Thailand continue to have for many years with an aim to sustainably better the people's livelihood and bring prosperity to both countries.

Brian Davidson, British Ambassador to Thailand, said:

The United Kingdom has been supporting middle-income countries through our Prosperity Fund Programmes to help them achieve sustainable and inclusive economic development. The Prosperity Fund's Better Health Programme aims to improve the people's health through partnership and collaborations with our partner countries. We are excited to be working with TCELS as a part of the global effort to fight against the pandemic that has disrupted the whole world. We hope the two research projects will help Thailand in its response to the coronavirus.

Dr. Nares Damrongchai, CEO of TCELS, said:

TCELS has the mission to support and groom Thailand's research and innovation that entail health and medical products and services. We aim to build in Thailand the environment, infrastructure and human resources that will enable the international-standard health and medical innovations that are relevant. We also work with our network to ready our business and investment capacities to enter the medical hub industry. One of our approaches is to give financial support to health and medical research projects under TCELS. We would like to thank the UK Government and the British Embassy Bangkok for joining us in supporting important researches that respond to global challenges.

We will continue to work with the UK on the area of health and medical research. The next phase of our collaborations will be about developing the capacities of genetic counselors for medical genomics and precision medicines, for which we hope to be able to announce some good news in the near future.

### **For more information :**

**Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation**

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## Ministry of Justice statement in fee-paid judicial litigation: July 2020

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## The fairest possible way to recognise students' achievements this year – by Roger Taylor, Chair

Results day, whether for GCSEs and A levels, is an emotional moment for young people across the country. This year, it will be especially so as grades are being awarded without young people having had the chance to prove their knowledge and skills in exams. Instead, they are being awarded grades on the basis of teacher judgements that have been moderated to ensure, as far as possible, consistency and fairness.

Around 5 million GCSE, AS and A level grades will be issued to students in England on results days. We expect the vast majority of the grades awarded to be within one grade of the centre assessment grades submitted by teachers. We know teachers worked extremely hard to deliver this year's arrangements and credit must be given to them for the care and professionalism with which they approached the task. We owe them our thanks for making this year's exceptional arrangements work fairly for their students.

When the Secretary of State took the difficult decision to cancel exams to help fight the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), it meant great uncertainty for students. In response, the education sector came together to develop and deliver the fairest possible way to recognise students' achievements this year. This has been a cross-sector collaborative effort and we are hugely

grateful to colleagues across the exam boards and awarding organisations, those representing schools, colleges and students for their thoughtful contributions, cooperation and support. Our aim has been to support students to progress to university, college, training or work, so that they can move on in their lives despite the cancellation of exams. This year, the system of calculated grades will provide students with their ticket to do that.

But for that ticket to have the same value as in any other year, it is essential that grades are consistent between schools and colleges and comparable over time. This is why teachers and teaching unions have overwhelmingly supported the use of standardisation when we consulted on this year's arrangements.

Our standardisation model makes adjustments to teachers' grades where needed to ensure a level playing field for students at different schools and colleges – in lots of ways, this is no different to what happens every year with teacher-marked course work, it's just operating at a much larger scale.

Given the importance of getting this right, and working with exam boards, statisticians and assessment experts, we tested 12 different standardisation models and selected the one which was the most accurate and the most fair.

In practice, this means that exam boards will look at the history of grades at the school or college and at the grades that this year's students have achieved in previous exams. This allows boards to measure how far a school or college has most likely overestimated or underestimated their grades compared to other centres. Some of the reporting of this process has suggested that some grades are being awarded purely on the basis of statistics. This is untrue. No grade is being awarded purely on the basis of statistics. Grades are awarded either wholly on the judgement of teachers or on a combination of teacher judgement and statistics. Where the statistics indicate a school or college has been over-optimistic (or too pessimistic), students are moved up or down according to the teachers' views as to which pupils were closest to the grade boundary. Adjustments will vary across schools and colleges – and will only be made where the evidence can support it – but a substantial number of students will receive at least one grade that has been adjusted as a result of the moderation process.

Lots of people have asked what would be so wrong with allowing teacher estimate grades to stand. In short, it would have resulted in unfairness between schools and colleges. Also, it would create a perpetual unfairness between this year's grades compared to past and future generations. There would be young people who would have most likely earned a C in an exam receiving an A-grade. Lastly, it would mean such an increase in the numbers of top grades, that they would no longer be credible, something that has happened in other countries, dealing with the same circumstances.

The approach we are taking is the fairest way to award grades without exams. But we understand that this does nothing to reduce the frustration of students who believe they would have been able to achieve a better grade, if they had had the chance to sit an exam. Also, we recognise that any process of this sort will produce results that need to be reviewed, which is why we

have put in place an appeals process.

In our consultation, an overwhelming majority of teachers said that when it comes to appeals, they did not feel it would be right that students should be able to challenge the judgements that their school or college had made about their work. We agree: any appeal would have to be done by someone better placed than teachers to judge a student's likely grade; in the circumstances this year, we do not believe there is such a person.

However, a student can ask their school to check what they submitted, to check for errors. Schools and colleges can also appeal if they feel that the moderation process has not adequately taken account of changes in the make up of this year's entry, for example if a school has been taken over and re-organised; or if it can show grades are lower than expected because students this year are very different from past years.

Although the process of moderation is essential to ensure results are as fair as they can be, the truth is that there is nothing fair about the fact that young people this year have been denied the possibility of demonstrating their skills in an exam. For that reason, in designing the moderation system, where we have had to make decisions that would affect the overall results, we have erred on allowing greater leniency. As a result, grades this year will have leniency built in: by around 2 percentage points at A level grade A and above (compared to a slight drop of 1 percentage point in 2019), and by up to 1 percentage point at grade 4 and above at GCSE (compared to a slight increase of 0.5 percentage points in 2019).

Our early analysis shows that students from all backgrounds – including more disadvantaged and black, ethnic minority and Asian communities – have not been disadvantaged by this year's awarding process. That is reassuring – but it is important that individuals are able to have their complaints heard if they feel they have been discriminated against.

Overall, students will get the best estimate that can be made of the grade they would have achieved if exams had gone ahead. But of course, a system of calculated grades and a statistical model can never know how an individual student might have performed on the day. These are best estimates, and it is possible that some students might have done better (or worse) had they taken an exam, but we will never know.

Colleagues across higher and further education understand this, and many have committed to showing flexibility in their admissions decisions. This will be welcome news for students who are intending to move on to further study in the autumn.

To all students receiving their results, whatever their next step, I wish them well. They have experienced a unique disruption to their lives. We hope that the grades awarded will enable as many as possible to move on with their lives with the least possible difficulty.

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## £1.2m innovation contracts awarded to help Army engineers survey water crossings

News story

DASA announces five small and medium-sized businesses to develop semi-autonomous reconnaissance and survey systems



The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) has awarded contracts worth a total £1.3m to develop semi-autonomous reconnaissance and survey systems to help troops safely and stealthily advance into enemy territory across water obstacles such as rivers.

[Map the Gap](#), run on behalf of the [Defence Science and Technology Laboratory \(Dstl\)](#), sought ideas from industry and academia to create a new remote system capable of surveying potential crossing sites by gathering data about the river banks.

Colonel Simon Bradley, Assistant Head Manoeuvre Support, Ground Manoeuvre Capability British Army, said:

We are hugely excited by the benefits the Map the Gap project may realise.

The reconnaissance of multiple potential crossing sites at the forward edge of the battle exposes soldiers to significant risk. Replacing and/or augmenting manned reconnaissance with a remote, beyond line-of-sight system will not only reduce the threat to life; it will also offer the ability to survey multiple crossing sites in a far more timely and efficient manner.

In turn, this will provide greater choice to ground commanders and

more opportunities to out-manoeuver our opponents. It will be a force multiplier for our next generation bridging systems.

Five small and medium-sized businesses have been awarded Phase 1 funding to fast-track their innovative solutions and test with the British Army.

The organisations are:

- Scytronix – whose proposal is for a drone mountable crossing assessment system that uses novel low frequency electromagnetic scanning techniques.
- Wight Ocean – to develop an amphibious bottom crawler to navigate and transit water crossing to gather near real-time data for analysis.
- Nordic Unmanned AS – to demonstrate unmanned aerial systems sensors, and data exploitation, and a semi-autonomous capability for engineer reconnaissance.
- Digital Concepts Engineering – to develop an unmanned ground vehicle and drone ‘team’ with a variety of sensors to gather, aggregate and present data.
- Foundry Cube in collaboration with Ultrabeam Hydrographic – to demonstrate an autonomous and amphibious hydrographic survey vehicle similar to a pedalo, using novel techniques tools and Sonar and Lidar (using laser light and measuring reflection).

The military need to be able to cross obstacles such as rivers, streams, bogs and other so-called ‘wet gaps’.

Currently, the only way of identifying suitable crossing points is to send Royal Engineer reconnaissance troops to survey both banks of the river – exposing them to danger which also risks compromising the operation by signalling interest in that location to the enemy.

Our vision is ultimately to remove personnel from these dangerous tasks with a remote system that allows more crossing locations to be surveyed, increasing the choices available to commanders and giving an opportunity to surprise the enemy.

An additional £2.5m is anticipated for further development in Phase 2.

Phase 1 funding:

- Scytronix – £251,900
- Wight Ocean – £309,282



- Nordic Unmanned AS – £272,656
- Digital Concepts Engineering – £331,133
- Foundry Cube – £177,789

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