British High Commission brings The Great Debate to Karachi

The British High Commission's fifth annual GREAT Debate competition continued with the final regional round at the Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology (SSUET) in Karachi.

The regional round in Karachi followed previous rounds in Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar, Faisalabad and Islamabad. The competition featured 29 students from universities across Karachi. At the end of an intense competition, Hafsa Tahir from University of Karachi and Muhammad Shahzaib Khan from Tabani School of Accountancy were declared the winner and runner-up respectively. The Chief Guest on the occasion was the British Deputy High Commissioner Karachi and Trade Director for Pakistan Mike Nithavrianakis.

The GREAT Debate competition is taking place from December 2019 to March 2020 in six cities across Pakistan.

Fouzia Younis, Director of Communication at the British High Commission said:

> I am delighted to bring our GREAT Debate competition to Karachi —
> the city of lights with a young population eager to learn and full
> of potential.
>
> The aim of our GREAT Debate competition is to support the next
> generation of Pakistan discover the value of debate, persuasion and
> discourse. I am confident the winner and runner-up will do well in
> the grand finale in Islamabad in March 2020.

This is the fifth annual edition of the British High Commission's GREAT Debate competition. Since 2015, the competition has taken place across 15 universities and 12 cities in Pakistan. The previous winners of the GREAT Debate competition have included: Gaudhan Aslam from Forman Christian College in Lahore, Taha Ahmed from Aga Khan University in Karachi, Mohiba Ahmed and Haris Ali Virk from Government College University in Lahore.

Further information

The GREAT Debate is a debating competition for university students. There will been six events — in six different cities (Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta and Faisalabad) involving students from leading universities across Pakistan — and the winner and runner-up of each round will compete in the grand final in Islamabad.

The winner and runner-up of the overall competition will receive a scholarship reward to contribute towards their tuition fees.

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Notes to editors

For updates on the British High Commission, please follow our social media channels:

[UK House Price Index for December 2019](#)

The December data shows:

- on average, house prices have risen by 0.3% since November 2019
- there has been an annual price rise of 2.2%, which makes the average property in the UK valued at £234,742

England

In England the December data shows, on average, house prices have risen by 0.6% since November 2019. The annual price rise of 2.2% takes the average property value to £251,711.

The regional data for England indicates that:

- the East of England experienced the greatest monthly price rise, up by 2.1%
- the North West saw the most significant monthly price fall, down by 0.6%
- Yorkshire and the Humber experienced the greatest annual price rise, up by 3.9%
- the South East saw the lowest annual price growth, up by 1.2%

Price change by region for England

Region	Average price December 2019	Monthly change % since November 2019
East Midlands	£197,048	0.5
East of England	£297,714	2.1
London	£483,922	1.6
North East	£130,977	0.5
North West	£166,003	-0.6
South East	£325,050	-0.3

Region	Average price December 2019	Monthly change % since November 2019
South West	£262,286	1.3
West Midlands	£201,343	-0.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	£168,382	1.7

Repossession sales by volume for England

The lowest number of repossession sales in October 2019 was in the East of England.

The highest number of repossession sales in October 2019 was in the North West.

Repossession sales	October 2019
East Midlands	52
East of England	16
London	43
North East	107
North West	160
South East	76
South West	45
West Midlands	60
Yorkshire and the Humber	90
England	649

Average price by property type for England

Property type	December 2019	December 2018	Difference %
Detached	£385,148	£373,190	3.2
Semi-detached	£236,187	£230,739	2.4
Terraced	£202,915	£198,769	2.1
Flat/maisonette	£228,375	£226,923	0.6
All	£251,711	£246,380	2.2

Funding and buyer status for England

Transaction type	Average price December 2019	Annual price change % since December 2018	Monthly price change % since November 2019
Cash	£236,853	2.0	0.8
Mortgage	£259,189	2.2	0.6
First-time buyer	£210,959	1.9	0.9
Former owner occupier	£285,944	2.4	0.4

Building status for England

Building status*	Average price October 2019	Annual price change % since October 2018	Monthly price change % since September 2019
New build	£310,143	0.6	-0.4
Existing resold property	£245,817	0.9	-0.1

*Figures for the 2 most recent months are not being published because there are not enough new build transactions to give a meaningful result.

London

London shows, on average, house prices have risen by 1.6% since November 2019. An annual price rise of 2.3% takes the average property value to £483,922.

Average price by property type for London

Property type	December 2019	December 2018	Difference %
Detached	£928,547	£899,415	3.2
Semi-detached	£590,170	£579,876	1.8
Terraced	£503,795	£490,483	2.7
Flat/maisonette	£423,844	£415,052	2.1
All	£483,922	£473,252	2.3

Funding and buyer status for London

Transaction type	Average price December 2019	Annual price change % since December 2018	Monthly price change % since November 2019
Cash	£508,340	2.3	2.4
Mortgage	£476,543	2.3	1.4
First-time buyer	£423,201	2.1	2.1
Former owner occupier	£546,304	2.4	0.9

Building status for London

Building status*	Average price October 2019	Annual price change % since October 2018	Monthly price change % since September 2019
New build	£490,706	-1.3	-2.0
Existing resold property	£473,336	-1.1	-0.7

*Figures for the 2 most recent months are not being published because there are not enough new build transactions to give a meaningful result.

Wales

Wales shows, on average, house prices have fallen by 2% since November 2019. An annual price rise of 2.2% takes the average property value to £165,735.

There were 49 repossession sales for Wales in October 2019.

Average price by property type for Wales

Property type	December 2019	December 2018	Difference %
Detached	£251,879	£245,946	2.4
Semi-detached	£160,368	£156,322	2.6
Terraced	£128,335	£125,002	2.7
Flat/maisonette	£113,391	£116,278	-2.5
All	£165,735	£162,234	2.2

Funding and buyer status for Wales

Transaction type	Average price December 2019	Annual price change % since December 2018	Monthly price change % since November 2019
Cash	£161,168	1.8	-1.6
Mortgage	£168,438	2.4	-2.1
First-time buyer	£143,271	2.3	-1.8
Former owner occupier	£191,878	2.0	-2.1

Building status for Wales

Building status*	Average price October 2019	Annual price change % since October 2018	Monthly price change % since September 2019
New build	£220,628	2.0	0.8
Existing resold property	£163,147	3.5	0.9

*Figures for the 2 most recent months are not being published because there are not enough new build transactions to give a meaningful result.

Access the full UK HPI

UK house prices

UK house prices increased by 2.2% in the year to December 2019, up from 1.7% in November 2019. On a non-seasonally adjusted basis, average house prices in the UK increased by 0.3% between November 2019 and December 2019, compared with a fall of 0.2% during the same period a year earlier (November 2018 and December 2018).

The UK Property Transaction Statistics for December 2019 showed that, on a seasonally adjusted basis, the estimated number of transactions on

residential properties with a value of £40,000 or greater was 104,670. This is 6.8% higher than a year ago. Between November 2019 and December 2019, transactions increased by 6.2%.

House price growth was strongest in Northern Ireland where prices increased by 2.5% over the year. The lowest annual growth was in the South East, where prices increased by 1.2% over the year to December 2019, followed by the West Midlands where prices increased by 1.4% over the year.

See the economic statement.

Background

1. The UK House Price Index (HPI) is published on the second or third Wednesday of each month with Northern Ireland figures updated quarterly. The January 2020 UK HPI will be published at 9.30am on Wednesday 25 March 2020. The 2019 UK HPI annual review will be published on Monday 24 February 2020. See calendar of release dates.

2. We have made some changes to improve the accuracy of the UK HPI. We are not publishing average price and percentage change for new builds and existing resold property as done previously because there are not currently enough new build transactions to provide a reliable result. This means that in this month's UK HPI reports, new builds and existing resold property are reported in line with the sales volumes currently available.

3. The UK HPI revision period has been extended to 13 months, following a review of the revision policy (see calculating the UK HPI section 4.4). This ensures the data used is more comprehensive.

4. Sales volume data is also available by property status (new build and existing property) and funding status (cash and mortgage) in our downloadable data tables. Transactions involving the creation of a new register, such as new builds, are more complex and require more time to process. Read revisions to the UK HPI data.

5. Revision tables have been introduced for England and Wales within the downloadable data. Tables will be available in csv format. See about the UK HPI for more information.

6. Data for the UK HPI is provided by HM Land Registry, Registers of Scotland, Land & Property Services/Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and the Valuation Office Agency.

7. The UK HPI is calculated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and

Land & Property Services/Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. It applies a hedonic regression model that uses the various sources of data on property price, in particular HM Land Registry's Price Paid Dataset, and attributes to produce estimates of the change in house prices each month. Find out more about the methodology used from the ONS and Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency.

8. The UK Property Transaction statistics are taken from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) monthly estimates of the number of residential and non-residential property transactions in the UK and its constituent countries. The number of property transactions in the UK is highly seasonal, with more activity in the summer months and less in the winter. This regular annual pattern can sometimes mask the underlying movements and trends in the data series so HMRC also presents the UK aggregate transaction figures on a seasonally adjusted basis. Adjustments are made for both the time of year and the construction of the calendar, including corrections for the position of Easter and the number of trading days in a particular month.

9. UK HPI seasonally adjusted series are calculated at regional and national levels only. See data tables.

10. The first estimate for new build average price (April 2016 report) was based on a small sample which can cause volatility. A three-month moving average has been applied to the latest estimate to remove some of this volatility.

11. Work has been taking place since 2014 to develop a single, official HPI that reflects the final transaction price for sales of residential property in the UK. Using the geometric mean, it covers purchases at market value for owner-occupation and buy-to-let, excluding those purchases not at market value (such as re-mortgages), where the 'price' represents a valuation.

12. Information on residential property transactions for England and Wales, collected as part of the official registration process, is provided by HM Land Registry for properties that are sold for full market value.

13. The HM Land Registry dataset contains the sale price of the property, the date when the sale was completed, full address details, the type of property (detached, semi-detached, terraced or flat), if it is a newly built property or an established residential building and a variable to indicate if the property has been purchased as a financed transaction (using a mortgage) or as a non-financed transaction (cash purchase).

14. Repossession sales data is based on the number of transactions lodged

with HM Land Registry by lenders exercising their power of sale.

15. For England, this is shown as volumes of repossession sales recorded by Government Office Region. For Wales, there is a headline figure for the number of repossession sales recorded in Wales.

16. The data can be downloaded as a CSV file. Repossession sales data prior to April 2016 is not available. Find out more information about [repossession sales](#).

17. Background tables of the raw and cleansed aggregated data, in Excel and CSV formats, are also published monthly although Northern Ireland is on a quarterly basis. They are available for free use and re-use under the Open Government Licence.

18. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales.

19. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. It operates as an executive agency and a trading fund and its running costs are covered by the fees paid by the users of its services. Its ambition is to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.

20. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership worth in excess of £7 trillion, including over £1 trillion of mortgages. The Land Register contains more than 25 million titles showing evidence of ownership for some 87% of the land mass of England and Wales.

21. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry.

22. Follow us on [Twitter](#), our [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

[Letter to The Telegraph from Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment](#)

Agency

Sir – The Environment Agency's dedication to protecting the nation from flooding is clear. We are on track to better protect 300,000 properties by March next year.

Your report ("Don't expect to be protected from flooding, agency warns", February 18) ignores the efforts of our staff, who have worked round the clock to protect over 85,000 properties from severe weather this winter. We have over 1,000 staff responding to Storm Dennis.

We have seen two storms in as many weeks, both leading to record-breaking river levels, and resulting in hundreds of flooded homes. The nature of extreme weather like this means that flood defences cannot prevent flooding everywhere, all of the time. It is likely that we will see similar events, in more places across the country, due to climate change.

We need to build climate resilience into everything we do, whether by avoiding inappropriate development in the floodplain, working with nature to slow the flow of water or building homes, businesses and infrastructure to be more flood-resilient.

Our long-term strategy, developed with communities and leaders in flood and coastal risk management, addresses these challenges. Key to this is levelling up resilience to flooding and coastal change across the country.

You mention that concerns have been raised about our approach to dredging. We will always dredge where necessary – but with rainfall of the kind we have seen, it would do little to protect homes and businesses. Our hearts go out to all those affected by the flooding, and we will continue to do all we can to keep people safe.

Emma Howard Boyd

Chair, Environment Agency

10,000 workers to boost British farming sector

The Government will quadruple the number of workers farms can recruit on a temporary basis from outside the EU this year to take up seasonal work.

Environment Secretary George Eustice confirmed today [19 February] the expansion of the Seasonal Workers Pilot to allow farmers to hire up to 10,000

workers in 2020 – an increase from the previous 2,500 workers.

This will support the UK's vital horticulture sector and give fruit and vegetable growers access to a much bigger pool of workers this year to help pick and gather even more Great British produce.

With soft fruit production in the UK continuing to skyrocket – growing by 185% between 1998 and 2018 – the expansion will support these farmers over this year's busy summer harvest, while allowing government to test the pilot further.

The announcement delivers on the commitment set out in the Government manifesto and comes as Home Secretary Priti Patel today set out plans for a new UK points-based immigration system, which will open up the UK to the brightest and the best from around the world, while reasserting control of our borders.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

> The farmers and growers I've spoken to have made a powerful case for needing more workers during the coming busy months.
>
> Expanding our Seasonal Workers Pilot will help our farms with the labour they need for this summer's harvest, while allowing us to test our future approach further.
>
> We will always back our farmers and growers, who produce world-famous British food to some of the highest standards anywhere in the world.

The [Seasonal Workers Pilot opened in 2019](#) and is designed to test the effectiveness of our immigration system at supporting UK growers during peak production periods, whilst maintaining robust immigration control. It will allow farms to hire workers for a period of up to six months and will continue to run until the end of 2020.

The expansion will allow government to keep testing how this pilot operates further, while helping to ease some of the pressure felt on farms when they are at their busiest.

Although the numbers are increasing based on the success of the pilot so far, it is not designed to meet the full labour needs of the horticultural sector. This workforce boost will complement the EU workers already travelling to the UK this year to provide seasonal labour on farms during the busy harvest months.

The pilot will be evaluated ahead of any decisions being taken on how future needs of the sector will be addressed.

[Home Secretary announces new UK points-based immigration system](#)

Home Secretary Priti Patel will today (Wednesday 19 February) launch a new points-based immigration system which will open up the UK to the brightest and the best from around the world.

The new system, which takes effect from 1 January 2021, will end free movement, reassert control of our borders and restore public trust.

It will assign points for specific skills, qualifications, salaries or professions and visas will only be awarded to those who gain enough points.

The government has listened to the clear message from the 2016 referendum and the 2019 General Election and will end the reliance on cheap, low-skilled labour coming into the country.

Overall levels of migration will be reduced, with tighter security and a better experience for those coming to the UK.

The new single global system will treat EU and non-EU citizens equally. It will give top priority to those with the highest skills and the greatest talents, including scientists, engineers and academics.

The [global talent scheme](#) will also be opened up to EU citizens which will allow highly-skilled scientists and researchers to come to the UK without a job offer.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

> Today is a historic moment for the whole country.
>
> We're ending free movement, taking back control of our borders and delivering on the people's priorities by introducing a new UK points-based immigration system, which will bring overall migration numbers down.
>
> We will attract the brightest and the best from around the globe, boosting the economy and our communities, and unleash this country's full potential.

The points threshold will be carefully set to attract the talent the UK needs. Skilled workers will need to meet a number of relevant criteria, including specific skills and the ability to speak English, to be able to work in the UK. All applicants will be required to have a job offer and, in line with the [Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) recommendations](#), the

minimum salary threshold will be set at £25,600.

The new points-based system will also expand the skills threshold for skilled workers. Those looking to live and work in the UK will now need to be qualified up to A level or equivalent, rather than degree level under the current system. This will provide greater flexibility and ensure UK business has access to a wide pool of skilled workers.

In line with the government's manifesto commitment there will be no specific route for low-skilled workers. It is estimated 70% of the existing EU workforce would not meet the requirements of the skilled worker route, which will help to bring overall numbers down in future.

Professor Alice Gast, President of Imperial College London, said:

> British science is global. The new post-study work and global talent visas will help us to attract the world's brightest students and researchers, wherever they come from.
>
> From the race to develop a coronavirus vaccine to clean energy, British science's international collaborations drive innovation and excellence.

Student visa routes will also be points-based and be opened up to EU citizens, ensuring talent from around the globe has access to the UK's world-class universities. Those wishing to study in the UK will need to demonstrate that they have an offer from an approved educational institution, that they can support themselves financially and that they speak English.

In addition, the seasonal workers pilot will also be expanded in time for the 2020 harvest from 2,500 to 10,000 places, responding to the specific temporary requirements of the agricultural sector.

EU citizens and other non-visa nationals will not require a visa to enter the UK when visiting the UK for up to 6 months. However, the use of national identity cards will be phased out for travel to the UK and the Home Office will set out our plans in due course.

Those EU citizens resident in the UK by 31 December 2020 can still apply to settle in the UK through the [EU Settlement Scheme](#) until June 2021.