

Government fulfils promise to veterans with new railcard

- new railcard, available from Armistice Day this year, will help boost veterans' job prospects and strengthen family bonds through cheaper travel
- over 830,000 eligible for a third off their fares, saving veterans and their families hundreds of pounds a year
- discount forms part of government's new veterans strategy to support former servicemen and women

Military veterans will get cut-price train travel to help boost job prospects and bring them closer to family and friends, with a new railcard on sale from Armistice Day, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today (22 January 2020).

Available from Armistice Day this year, the railcard will extend discounted train travel to the more than 830,000 veterans not covered by existing discounts.

Joined by veterans at St Pancras railway station, the Transport Secretary and the Minister for the Cabinet Office underlined the government's commitment to supporting former service personnel and recognised their service to the country.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Every part of society should honour the debt we owe those who've served our country. I'm proud that the Department for Transport, together with other government colleagues and the rail industry, is doing its bit.

This railcard will help open up opportunities to veterans, whether through employment and retraining, or by strengthening links with friends and family. I believe that enabling former service personnel to travel more easily is the least we can do.

The money-saving announcement, delivering on a manifesto commitment, forms part of the government's veterans strategy.

This action plan, which is also being launched today, outlines what government is doing to deliver more for our veterans and sets out holistic support for those who served, in areas including community and relationships, employment and skills, health and wellbeing, finance and debt, housing, and contact with the law.

The strategy will be coordinated by the recently-established [Office for](#)

Veterans Affairs.

Cabinet Office Minister Oliver Dowden, who represents the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) in Cabinet said:

The Office for Veterans' Affairs was set up to get things done for our veterans. I am pleased to see that the OVA is already able to show it is achieving just this, working with the Department for Transport to deliver this railcard.

Our new action plan will help to make the UK the best place in the world for veterans. The Office for Veterans' Affairs will drive the plan from the heart of government, working to help veterans on jobs, housing and health, through better data and a more joined up approach.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

Discounted train travel is a fantastic way to recognise those who have served this country, and the speed at which plans have been worked up shows how seriously we are taking our commitments to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran.

The railcard is only the start though, and I'm clear we need to do more to look after the people who so selflessly put their lives on the line to look after us.

Now the action plan has been published, I look forward to continuing to drive forward this issue across government and the services we offer.

Today, the government is also releasing its response for the consultation into the veterans strategy, which includes an action plan on how the Office for Veterans' Affairs will coordinate departments to help veterans over the next 2 years.

Public responses to the consultation underlined the need for a more coordinated approach to veterans support. Other key findings include a call to promote a positive perception of veterans and a need to increase awareness of the support already offered from across central and local government.

High-tech products to level the

playing field for disabled pupils

Trials of pioneering technology to help disabled pupils in the classroom will take place across the country in the first programme of its kind in the world.

Speaking at the largest education technology show in the world today (22 January), Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Minister Chris Skidmore will announce plans to fund trials of ground-breaking assistive technology for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in up to 100 schools and colleges.

Innovations are expected to include 'text-to-speech' and 'speech recognition' software, which can help pupils with dyslexia improve their reading and proof-reading. Other trials include the use of eye-gaze technology, which can help pupils with severe motor impairments to communicate, helping to level the playing field for children with additional needs.

Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Chris Skidmore is expected to say:

Harnessing the power of modern technology can help us change lives and unlock the potential of every child.

With technological advances happening at increasingly breakneck speed, it is only right that we ride the wave so pupils in our classrooms with special educational needs are given all the support they need.

The trials of cutting-edge technology will be funded by an initial investment of £300,000, as part of a wider investment of £10 million through the Department's EdTech Strategy, which aims to transform the use of technology in education to support innovation and raise the bar in schools, colleges and universities across England.

The pilots will run from April 2020 until the end of the 2020-21 academic year and will assess the impact of different types of assistive technology for pupils with special educational needs, informing best practice on the tools which most help pupils in the classroom.

EdTech exports are worth an estimated £170 million to the UK economy, and the strategy will deliver on the Government's ambition for tech firms to work with the education sector and create innovative solutions to 10 key education challenges, including:

- Promote the use of innovative tech to level the playing field for people with special educational needs and disabilities – identifying the technology that best suits individual needs;
- Reduce teachers' marking workload – using technology to cut the time

- teachers spend preparing and marking homework;
- Demonstrate how artificial intelligence can support the effective delivery of online learning and training for adults; and
- Prove that the use of apps contributes to improved literacy and communications skills for disadvantaged children

Chief Executive of Nasen Professor Adam Boddison said:

Assistive technology is increasingly being used by schools to ensure that pupils with SEND have full access to the curriculum offer.

This programme will play an important role in providing a reliable evidence base for schools so they can be as effective as possible in their use of assistive technology.

This programme sits alongside the development of a network of Demonstrator schools and colleges to support peer-to-peer learning in the use of technology, which will launch in Spring 2020. These will be supported by a consortium consisting of the London Grid for Learning, The Education Foundation and the Sheffield Institute of Education.

[Serious violent and sexual offenders to spend longer in prison](#)

- Automatic half-way release for serious offenders to end from April
- Ministers act to ensure punishment reflects the severity of the crime
- Laws introduced today are part of extensive overhaul to criminal justice system

Legislation brought before Parliament today (22 January) will end the automatic half-way release for offenders sentenced for crimes such as rape, manslaughter and GBH. Instead they will be made to spend two-thirds of their sentence in prison, before being subject to strict licence conditions upon release.

The changes follow yesterday's announcement of tougher sentences for the most serious terrorist offenders, and will apply to anyone handed a standard determinate sentence of seven years or more, where the maximum penalty is life. The most dangerous offenders already face life sentences and may never be released.

Justice Secretary & Lord Chancellor, Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

Time and again victims tell me they feel let down by a system that can see violent and sexual offenders back on the streets after serving just half their sentence.

So we will end the automatic half-way release for these offenders – ensuring punishment truly fits the crime and restore the public's faith in the justice system.

Since 2005 the majority of these criminals serve what is known as 'standard determinate sentences' and are released automatically at the half-way point, serving the second half of their sentence in the community. The Government will change the release point to two-thirds for certain serious offenders which will allow for a greater period of rehabilitation in prison as they prepare to resettle into the community.

The move is part of an overhaul of the criminal justice system which will see 20,000 new police officers, an extra 10,000 prison places and a new Sentencing Bill to ensure the most serious offenders spend longer in jail. The reforms include yesterday's [announcement](#) of tougher sentences for the most serious terrorist offenders.

Notes to editors

- Two Statutory Instruments are being debated today, the Release of Prisoners (Alteration of Relevant Proportion of Sentence) Order 2019 and the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (Consequential Amendment) Regulations Order 2019. The first will change the release point for those serving standard determinate sentences of 7 years or more where the maximum sentence is life to the two-thirds point. The second SI is a technical instrument to ensure the changes can apply to those serving consecutive sentences.
- If approved by both Houses the changes will come into force on 1 April 2020 and will apply to relevant sentences imposed on or after that date.
- There are a range of sentences available for violent and sexual offenders which include: A life sentence – offender spends minimum period or "tariff" in prison before being considered for release by the Parole Board. The offender may therefore never be released. If released, offenders spend the rest of their life on licence and can be recalled to custody.
- Extended Determinate Sentence – offender becomes eligible to be considered for release by the Parole Board from the two-thirds point but can serve the full term in prison if not assessed to be safe to release earlier. The custodial term is followed by an extended period on licence for on-going public protection (of up to eight years for sex offenders and five years for violent offenders).
- Standard Determinate Sentence – the offender will be automatically released at the half way point in this sentence and be on licence in the community for the second half of the sentence. Those serving short sentences will have additional supervision in the community for a

minimum period of 12 months.

- The vast majority of offenders who are sentenced for serious sexual and violent offences which carry a maximum life sentence receive a Standard Determinate Sentence.
- In 2018, there were over 4,000 Standard Determinate Sentences imposed for sexual /violent offences which carry a maximum penalty of life. There were around 250 Extended Determinate Sentences, and 400 life sentences for such offences.
- The changes will apply to the most serious violent or sexual offences which carry a maximum penalty of life. This could include crimes such as manslaughter, rape or GBH.

[New digital portal to strengthen safeguarding guidance for charities](#)

The [portal](#), based on Gov.uk, offers a step by step guide to help charities correctly manage their concerns, identify the right people to contact if needed and access helpful resources and advice.

Following a combined £1.2 million DCMS and National Lottery Community Fund investment the portal will be promoted by six organisations across England. They have been appointed to champion the importance of good safeguarding and locally available sources of advice and support.

The funding has been awarded to:

- [Voluntary Organisations Network North East \(VONNE\)](#) £115,000: VONNE will partner with four local infrastructure organisations in the North East to deliver regular training sessions, develop local safeguarding networks where needed, and share the NCV0 resources widely.
- [Action with Communities in Rural England \(ACRE\)](#) £104,950: ACRE will use their network of 38 county based members to reach rural villages and community halls and share safeguarding materials and resources. They will promote the resources on their website, through newsletters and networking events supporting management committees and volunteers.
- [Voluntary Action Leeds \(VAL\)](#) £94,000: This project will be delivered in partnership with five infrastructure organisations in West Yorkshire and York – Community Action Bradford and District, Wakefield Young Lives Consortium, VSI Alliance Calderdale, Third Sector Leaders Kirklees and York CVS. Working as a partnership with locally tailored delivery, there will be a particular focus on volunteer-led groups and those working

with BAME and new migrant communities. They will distribute resources via peer-to-peer support, signposting and strengthening of existing networks to enable local networking and mutual support.

- [Social Care Institute for Excellence \(SCIE\)](#) £100,000: SCIE will support small faith-based organisations to access materials via regional workshops across the country, webinars and bespoke training courses. They will also work with user-led organisations supporting people with disabilities to devise a checklist looking at safeguarding governance and accountability.
- [The Federation of London Youth Clubs – London Youth](#) £76,641: London Youth will directly train and support youth workers, volunteers and trustees operating in grassroots community youth organisations across London. They will share materials with a wide cohort of organisations, through webinars and local peer safeguarding support groups.
- [National Association for Voluntary Community Action \(NAVCA\)](#) £104,700: NAVCA will utilise its national membership base to share resources through communication materials, peer to peer learning within networks and awareness raising events.

The funding has also enabled the NCVO to bring together a partnership of organisations to develop a series of [free, high-quality factsheets, practical tools, podcasts and videos](#) to promote a good safeguarding culture in charities.

Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran said:

It is absolutely right that charities have access to the best advice and guidance for dealing with any safeguarding concerns. Charities must be safe spaces for everyone – be that those who use their important services, volunteers or employees.

I am pleased to launch this new digital portal to share best practice across the country.

We support charities, community groups, and people with great ideas – local or national, large or small, no matter what their starting point. Easier access to safeguarding tools, resources and support will help them to keep staff and volunteers safe as they bring people together and deliver their fantastic work.

Matt Hyde, Chief Executive at the Scouts said:

Reporting safeguarding concerns and allegations is an essential step in keeping children, young people and vulnerable adults safe from harm, but often people don't know what to report and to whom. That's why I've been proud to work with DCMS, charity sector colleagues, the police and safeguarding experts to develop a digital tool to assist charity trustees, staff and volunteers in knowing how to report safeguarding concerns.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

HPV vaccine drives cancer causing infections down to very low levels

Cancer-causing HPV16 and 18 infections are now extremely uncommon in young sexually active women in England, following the introduction of HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination in 2008.

These infections were found in less than 2% of 16 to 18-year-old women between 2014 and 2018, new data from Public Health England (PHE) show. In a sample of 584 young women tested in 2018, no HPV16 or 18 infections were detected.

This is a dramatic reduction from 2008, when over 15% of young sexually active women were found to have these infections.

Marta Checchi, Senior Scientist, Public Health England, said:

This is now the fifth year of finding less than 2% of young sexually active women infected with HPV16 or 18. These new data demonstrate the huge impact of the vaccination programme in its first 10 years.

Cervical cancer is currently the most common cancer in women under 35, killing about 850 women a year.

HPV causes 99% of cervical cancers and types 16 and 18 are responsible for around 4 in 5 cases. The virus can also cause anal and penile cancer and some types of head and neck cancer.

The prevalence of HPV6 and 11, which cause 90% of genital warts, also fell for the first time in 16 to 18-year-old women, from fluctuating around 7% to 10% between 2010 and 2017, down to 4% in 2018.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, Consultant Epidemiologist, Public Health England, said:

This is clear evidence of the success of our immunisation programme, which continues to achieve high coverage.

With millions of young women protected by HPV vaccination, we expect to see big reductions in cervical cancer in years to come and the introduction of the boys' programme will accelerate this progress.

I encourage parents of all eligible girls and boys to ensure they take up this potentially life-saving vaccine when offered.

Nicola Blackwood, Health Minister said:

Thousands fewer women and men will be diagnosed with cancer as a result of the HPV vaccination programme and declining infection rates.

Our world-leading vaccination programmes are vital in protecting young children and preventing the spread of a host of awful diseases. It's incredible to think that this vaccination is helping us eradicate cervical cancer for good.

The national HPV vaccination programme was introduced for girls in 2008 and extended to boys in 2019. The current vaccine protects against HPV16, 18, 6 and 11.

The prevalence of 3 other cancer-causing types, HPV31, 33 and 45, has also declined, suggesting the vaccine provides substantial cross-protection.

The first dose of the HPV vaccine is offered to 12 and 13-year-olds in year 8. The second dose is given routinely anytime between 6 to 12 months after. Two doses are needed to be fully protected.

The latest PHE statistics show that 83.9% of year 9 girls had received both doses in 2018 to 2019. Eleven million doses of the vaccine have been given to young women in England, meaning over 80% of women aged 15 to 24 are protected.

The success of the programme is thanks to hard work and collaboration across the health sector, including the NHS and local government.

Young people who missed the vaccine when it was offered to them at school should talk to their school nurse or GP to arrange getting caught up without delay. They remain eligible until their 25th birthday.

It is important that women who have had the HPV vaccine still attend cervical screening when invited as the vaccine does not protect against all types of the virus.

Professor Peter Johnson, NHS national clinical director for cancer said:

Eligible people should go and get this vaccine, which has been incredibly successful in driving down infections that cause cancer, and which is a potential life saver for millions of young women and men, protecting them from a range of cancers.

Thanks to a range of action set out in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and the new way of screening for cervical cancer which is now in place across the country, we hope that cervical cancer can be eliminated altogether, building on recent progress which has seen record-high cancer survival.