

Intergalactic investment: government boosts space tech funding to cut carbon emissions and improve energy security

- £3 million for projects to collect solar power with satellites in the Earth's orbit
- government-backed high power weather sensor, four times more powerful than those on existing satellites, to enter orbit for the first time
- David Morris MP to be new National Space Champion, supporting the industry on behalf of government

Funding for pioneering new space technologies will help to cut carbon emissions, improve energy security and enhance the UK's reputation as a science superpower, the Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng announced today.

£3 million of grant funding will be made available for space-based solar power (SBSP) projects that collect the Sun's energy using solar panels orbiting the Earth and can deliver clean energy, day and night, unaffected by the weather.

The technology has the potential to boost energy security by providing reliable, affordable alternative to expensive and volatile fossil fuels, while reducing the UK's contributions to climate change.

Grant funding will also be made available for cutting-edge weather monitoring sensors to aid more accurate weather forecasts. The sensors will be put into orbit for the first time, thanks to a partnership with data and analytics company Spire Global.

The Hyperspectral Microwave Sounder (HYMS), developed by the Science and Technology Facilities Council's [RAL Space](#), will help meteorological agencies and businesses around the world involved with planning, shipping and flood warnings. It is 4 times more powerful than the sensors used on existing satellites.

In a further demonstration of the government's commitment to the sector, Morecambe and Lunesdale MP David Morris will serve as the first ever National Space Champion. He will work closely with industry to ensure the UK's space sector continues to grow, attract investment, and develop innovative products. Morris is a longstanding advocate for the UK space industry and chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Space.

Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

Space-based solar power could provide an affordable, clean and reliable source of energy for the whole world to benefit from, helping the move away from expensive fossil fuels. Today's investment is an exciting example of how we can go even further in our ambitions to make the UK a science superpower.

I am also delighted that the HYMS technology, developed in Oxfordshire, will be put into service by Spire Global to help improve weather forecasting.

These projects are major milestones for our National Space Strategy, developing the UK's space capabilities while boosting the economy and delivering high-skill jobs.

National Space Champion David Morris MP said:

It is a privilege to be asked to be the first UK National Space Champion and the appointment shows the government's commitment to the sector and its commitment to its growth.

The UK space sector is fast becoming a world leader and I look forward to being a champion for the industry within government to ensure we are able to spearhead the industry to even further growth.

An independent report found significant commercial potential in developing SBSP's underlying technologies as products in their own right – particularly with regards to wireless power transmission and solar power.

Similarly, the HYMS occupies a footprint fifty times smaller than current technology, which makes it possible to launch dozens of HYMS-equipped satellites, together forming a constellation that can track fast moving extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

Dr Paul Bate, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

Satellite technology is helping us solve some of the most significant challenges we face. We're working with the space sector to drive innovation, catalyse investment and bring tangible benefits to people and businesses across the UK.

As these 2 new projects show, space is not only vital in helping us monitor the weather and our environment, it can also provide new solutions to our future energy needs and support the global fight against climate change.

I would like also like to welcome the appointment of a National Space Champion and I look forward to working with David Morris to support our growing sector.

The UK space sector employs around 47,000 people directly around the UK and supports around 190,000 jobs in the supply chain. By building on the commitments of the [National Space Strategy](#) to grow the economy and lead pioneering scientific discovery, these 2 projects will help to protect and grow these high-quality jobs across the country for generations to come.

1. HYMS was developed by RAL Space, the UK's national space laboratory, at Harwell Space Cluster in Oxfordshire, with £600,000 funding from the UK Space Agency (UKSA) National Space Innovation Programme.

2. The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) RAL Space will work with data and analytics company Spire Global to prepare HYMS for deployment in space, with the long-term objective of providing a full constellation of satellites.

3. Work will be carried out both in Oxfordshire, at RAL Space, and in Glasgow where Spire Global has its UK headquarters and satellite manufacturing facility. The space industry supported 8,440 jobs in Scotland in 2020, almost a fifth of the total 46,995 jobs in the space industry across the whole of the UK. The UK space sector generates an income of £16.5 billion a year. Scotland will also host the UK's first vertical small satellite launches next year, from the SaxaVord and Sutherland spaceports.

4. STFC is part of UK Research Innovation.

5. More information on the Space Based Solar Power concept can be found in the report [Space based solar power: de-risking the pathway to net zero](#), commissioned by BEIS. Funding for the SBSP Innovation Programme has been made available from the [Net Zero Innovation Portfolio](#).

6. David Morris has been the Member of Parliament for Morecambe and Lunesdale since 2010. He has previously served as a member of the Commons Science and Technology Committee and was the government's ambassador for freelancers and the self-employed (2014-2016). He was appointed an Assistant Government Whip in July 2022, and currently chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Lancashire.

[**New plan for tourism boards will make it easier for holiday makers to plan trips in England**](#)

- Government to provide £4 million to support regions to bring in more visitors and investment to destinations all over the country, including those off the beaten track
- Tourism boards have successfully helped to deliver the Eden Project,

UNESCO World Heritage Sites and contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the economy every year

Tourism boards are to undergo a radical restructuring to make it easier for holiday makers and visitors to discover a wide range of English destinations, Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston announced today.

The government wants a simpler structure where tourism boards, known as Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), are a one-stop shop for visitors to find all they need to know about a local area and will accredit the best tourist boards as the place to go for that information.

DMOs, such as Visit Cornwall, Marketing Manchester and Cumbria Tourism, have the power to drive investment for new attractions, bring in visitors from around the world and boost the local economy. DMOs are often used by tourists to plan trips, book accommodation and find local attractions.

However, last year's independent review into DMOs, carried out by Chair of VisitEngland's Advisory Board Nick de Bois, found that the landscape is overcrowded and fragmented. For example there are 46 DMOs of all shapes and sizes in the South-East alone, which makes it confusing for tourists planning breaks and businesses looking to invest.

To streamline DMOs, support the tourism sector and drive more local investment, DCMS will provide £4 million over the next three years to fund a new accreditation scheme, developed and administered by VisitEngland, for the highest performing DMOs.

This funding will also be used to create a pilot in one region of the country, giving one top-tier DMO or a group of local DMOs the opportunity and investment to restructure under a new model, to show the best their region has to offer.

This plan will make sure that tourists know where to go to find quality, trusted information, tailored to the local area. It will mean that a family holidaying in the Lake District, for example, will be able to easily find a high-quality campsite or hotel, good local food options, information on where the landscape is well-maintained and what range of local activities are on offer for their children from an expert DMO. With streamlined DMOs, it will be easier for tourists to know what is available when planning their breaks, and for local businesses to work together to provide an excellent tourism offer.

Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston said:

Our brilliant tourism sector is vital to our levelling-up agenda. It creates jobs, helps drive local economies and promotes pride in place, making villages, towns and cities more attractive to visit, live and work in.

This new scheme will show people where to visit and help them plan the best possible trip, supporting our tourism industry to be

bigger and better than before.

At their best, DMOs can make a real difference to their local areas. Visit Cornwall, for example, helped to secure over £40 million investment for the Eden Project, which has welcomed more than 18 million visitors and generated £2 billion for the South West.

Marketing Manchester has generated almost £400 million a year for its local economy in visitor spend as well as promoting new international air routes, and Cumbria Tourism was instrumental in winning the coveted UNESCO World Heritage Status for the Lake District National Park.

Under the new accreditation scheme, DMOs will be renamed Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). The scheme will streamline the sector so holiday-makers and visitors can more easily understand what is on offer in a region and plan trips, and make sure local businesses can come together to successfully develop and market their local area as a must-see destination.

The scheme will also bring together local businesses with the local authority to successfully pitch for funding to develop the area's visitor economy, and efficiently and compellingly market the area to visitors.

The accreditation scheme will run alongside the pilot of a tiering model in a region of England. This pilot will run over the next couple of years and will give one top tier partnership or a collection of partnerships (known as a Destination Development Partnership) funding and the opportunity to focus on activities that ensure their destination remains sustainable, competitive and responsive to challenges such as boosting skills, accessibility and levelling up.

Tourism is vital to England's economy. It contributed £72 billion to the UK in 2019, employs people across the country, delivers local economic growth and makes people feel proud of where they live.

VisitEngland Director Andrew Stokes said:

VisitEngland welcomes the Government's response to the de Bois review of Destination Management Organisations in England and the opportunity to play our part in implementing the recommendations.

Destination Management Organisations are a vital part of England's tourism landscape, connecting with local businesses and Government agencies to attract investment and visitors across the regions, boosting the visitor economy. We look forward to implementing the accreditation scheme and the Destination Development Partnership pilot, ensuring we have the right national and local infrastructure to enable England to continue to be a compelling destination for domestic and international visitors. This will also strengthen the case for future funding.

Malcolm Bell, Chief Executive, VisitCornwall, said:

Visit Cornwall would like to thank Nick De Bois and the team that undertook the review and we welcome this announcement. There has been a growing, and more recently, urgent need to ensure that the tourist board structure in England is fit for purpose for the challenges facing the visitor economy in the coming decades. It recognises past successes, but more importantly creates a clear structure of the proposed Local Visitor Economy Partnerships

These partnerships between the private and public sectors, will ensure coordinated domestic and overseas marketing, delivering increased productivity and improving the quality of employment through tackling seasonality, capitalising on business tourism, whilst making significant progress on net zero and regenerative tourism developments that are key for the future success of the sector.

Sheona Southern, Managing Director, Marketing Manchester, said:

We have long recognised that there needs to be better connection between national policy and local delivery and we hope that this initiative will be the start of creating an effective tourism structure required to make England competitive globally and put tourism at the centre of local policy making.

Gill Haigh, Managing Director, Cumbria Tourism, said:

DMOs are the glue that bring together the huge array of parties in an area that make up its visitor economy. There has been overwhelming support for the outcomes of the De Bois review which really captured the opportunities to sustainably grow our visitor economy, as well as some of the barriers, but importantly offered Government a clear route forward.

Cumbria Tourism therefore welcomes the announcement from Government today that it intends to simplify and strengthen the structure and looks forward to hearing the finer detail and to ensure we can maximise our potential and work with DCMS, Visit England and partners locally to support sustainable visitor growth, investment and business support.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

See the [full response on gov.uk](#)

[First Women's Health Strategy for England to tackle gender health gap](#)

- Major new research on women's health issues to increase understanding of female specific health conditions and tackle the data gap to ensure diagnosis and treatment work for women.
- Ensuring all doctors are trained to provide the best care to women by introducing mandatory specific teaching and assessment on women's health for all graduating medical students and incoming doctors.
- £10 million for breast screening programme to provide 25 new mobile breast screening units for areas with the greatest challenges of screening uptake.

Women and girls across England will benefit from improved healthcare following the publication of the first ever government-led Women's Health Strategy for England today (Wednesday 20 July).

Following a call for evidence which generated almost 100,000 responses from individuals across England, and building on Our Vision for Women's Health, the strategy sets bold ambitions to tackle deep-rooted, systemic issues within the health and care system to improve the health and wellbeing of women and reset how the health and care system listens to women.

The strategy includes key commitments around new research and data gathering, the expansion of women's health-focused education and training for incoming doctors, improvements to fertility services, ensuring women have access to high quality health information, and updating guidance for female specific health conditions like endometriosis to ensure the latest evidence and advice is being used in treatment.

Women live on average for longer than men but spend more of their life in poor health, often limiting their ability to work and participate in day to day activities. Closing the gender health gap and supporting women to live well will not only benefit the health and wellbeing of women, but the health of the economy.

Responses to the call for evidence highlighted a need for greater focus on women's specific health conditions including fertility and pregnancy loss, and gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis, which affects 1 in 10 women. To support progress already underway in these areas the strategy aims to:

- Provide a new investment of £10 million for a breast screening programme, which will provide 25 new mobile breast screening units to be targeted at areas with the greatest challenges of uptake and coverage. This will provide extra capacity for services to recover from the impact of the pandemic, boost uptake of screening in areas where attendance is low, tackle health disparities and contribute towards higher early diagnosis rates in line with the NHS Long Term Plan.
- Remove additional barriers to IVF for female same-sex couples. There will no longer be a requirement for them to pay for artificial insemination to prove their fertility status, and NHS treatment for female same-sex couples will start with 6 cycles of artificial insemination, prior to accessing IVF services if necessary.
- Improve transparency on provision and availability of IVF so prospective parents can see how their local area performs to tackle the “postcode lottery” in access to IVF treatment.
- Recognise parents who have lost a child before 24 weeks through the introduction of a pregnancy loss certificate in England.
- Ensure specialist endometriosis services have the most up to date evidence and advice by updating the service specification for severe endometriosis, which defines the standards of care patients can expect, to ensure. This sits alongside the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) review of its guideline on endometriosis.

This will support our ambition that national healthcare services consider women’s needs specifically and by default, and that women can access services that meet their reproductive health needs throughout their lives.

Health and Social Care Secretary Steve Barclay said:

Our health and care system only works if it works for everyone.

It is not right that 51% of our population are disadvantaged in accessing the care they need, simply because of their sex.

The publication of this strategy is a landmark moment in addressing entrenched inequalities and improving the health and wellbeing of women across the country.

Minister for Women’s Health Maria Caulfield said:

When we launched our call for evidence to inform the publication of this strategy, women across the country set us a clear mandate for change.

Tackling the gender health gap will not be easy – there are deep seated, systemic issues we must address to ensure women receive the same standards of care as men, universally and by default.

This strategy is the start of that journey, but eradicating the gender health gap can’t be done through health services alone. I am

calling on everyone who has the power to positively impact women's health, from employers to doctors and teachers to industry, to join us in our journey.

Women and clinicians also called for the expansion of information and educational resources for women and healthcare professionals, and more cohesion in the way services are provided, making it as simple as possible for women to access the healthcare they need.

Our vision set out that all women should have access to high-quality information and education from childhood through to adulthood, and that all women should have equal access to and experience of services, reducing disparities in outcomes. Building on this, the strategy commits to:

- Transforming the NHS website into a world-class, first port of call for women's health information by updating existing content and adding new pages – including on adenomyosis, a gynaecological condition where endometrial tissue grows into the muscle of the uterus – and bringing together third-party new and existing content.
- Encouraging the expansion of Women's Health Hubs around the country and other models of 'one-stop clinics', bringing essential women's services together to support women to maintain good health and drive efficiency in the NHS, helping clinicians as they work to tackle the Covid backlogs.
- Publishing a definition of trauma-informed practice for use in the health sector and encouraging its adoption in health settings, to help address barriers to accessing services that people affected by trauma such as domestic violence or psychological abuse can experience, ensuring they can access the care they need.

Women's Health Ambassador Dame Lesley Regan said:

Having spent my career looking after women, I am deeply aware of the need for a women's health strategy which empowers both women and clinicians to tackle the gender health gap.

We need to make it as easy as possible for women to access the services they need, to keep girls in school and women in the workplace, ensuring every woman has the opportunity to live her life to her fullest potential.

This strategy is a major step in the right direction, listening to the concerns of women, professionals and other organisations to tackle some of the deep rooted issues that we know exist.

Feedback from thousands of women across the country revealed that they feel their voices were not always listened to, and there was a lack of understanding or awareness amongst some medical professionals about health conditions which affect women. To address this, the strategy commits to:

- Commissioning urgent research by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) into healthcare professionals' experiences of listening to women in primary care, with a focus on menstrual and gynaecological symptoms to inform policy to ensure women's voices are heard.
- Introducing specific teaching and assessments on women's health in undergraduate curricula for all graduating medical students from 2024 to 2025 and for all incoming doctors.
- Major investment via the NIHR into research on women's health issues including a new policy research unit on reproductive health, and plans to address data gaps, identify barriers to women participating in research, and improve the quality of data collected by the NHS. This will include running a new reproductive health experience survey every two years to continue to listen to women and gather insight on their experiences of services, including for contraception and menopause.

By tackling the gender data gap through increased research, building understanding through training and tackling the root causes of why women's voices are not always listened to, both women and clinicians should feel empowered to have more informed discussions over their care.

Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department of Health and Social Care and Chief Executive Officer of the NIHR Lucy Chappell said:

The gender health gap stems from a range of factors. Over the years we have seen less research into health conditions that affect women and this gender data gap has had a significant contribution on the impact of such research.

The NIHR has made good progress in this area, from increased research on conditions such as endometriosis, boosting participation of women in trials and supporting female researchers.

The publication of this strategy builds on that progress and will help ensure women's voices and priorities are at the heart of research.

The publication of the Strategy is the latest action taken by the government to address the issues and disparities many women face. This includes appointing the first ever Women's Health Ambassador for England earlier this year, the creation of a network of family hubs in 75 upper-tier local authorities across England, and providing protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

We have also taken action to increase access to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and reduce costs of this medication. The creation of a prepayment certificate will mean women can access HRT on a month-by-month basis if need be, easing pressure on supply, paying a one-off charge equivalent to two single prescription charges, currently £18.70, for all their HRT prescriptions for a year. This system will be implemented by April 2023.

To ensure women can reliably access HRT, decisive action has been taken including the appointment of Madelaine McTernan as chair of the HRT supply taskforce and issuing of serious shortage protocols to even out distribution and provide greater flexibility to allow community pharmacists to supply specified alternatives, where appropriate.

The government has already been taking action to begin to address the issues and disparities women face, including:

- establishing a Maternity Disparities Taskforce to tackle disparities in outcomes and experiences of care for women and babies by improving access to pre-conception and maternity care for women from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas
- investing £127 million to increase and support the maternity NHS workforce and to increase neonatal care capacity over the next year. This is on top of £95 million investment into recruitment of an additional 1,200 midwives and 100 consultant obstetricians
- establishing the UK Menopause Taskforce to drive forward the work on improving healthcare support for women, raise levels of awareness in the population and among healthcare professionals, encourage workplace support and consider where further research is needed to address gaps in the evidence base
- reducing the cost of, and improving access to, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) by identifying ways to support the HRT supply chain and addressing shortages some women face on a limited number of products, and by reducing the cost of HRT through a new bespoke HRT pre-payment certificate which we will introduce by April 2023
- banning virginity testing and hymenoplasty in the UK through the Health and Care Act 2022. Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are forms of violence against women and girls and such practices will not be tolerated in the UK
- enhancing women's reproductive wellbeing in the workplace through the Health and Wellbeing Fund 2022 to 2025. The fund supports voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to expand and develop projects to support women experiencing reproductive health issues such as the pregnancy loss or menopause to remain in or return to the workplace.
- banning the availability of 'Botox' and cosmetic fillers to under 18s for cosmetic purposes and banning adverts for cosmetic surgery that target under-18s
- investing £302 million in family hubs and the start for life programme, including the creation of a network of family hubs in 75 upper-tier local authorities across England, bespoke parent-infant relationship and perinatal mental health support, and the establishment of breastfeeding support services
- providing protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- abolishing the tampon tax, removing VAT from women's sanitary products, and rolling out of free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals
- introducing the Online Safety Bill, to make the UK the safest place in

the world to be online. The bill will restrict exposure to legal but harmful content, such as exposure to self-harm, harassment and eating disorders content.

Education providers resilient as COVID challenges continue

Ofsted has today published the [third set of briefings](#) in a series looking at the pandemic's continued impact on education providers.

The 3 reports, which follow on from [those published in April](#), find that most education providers are adapting to life with COVID-19 and focusing on the effectiveness of their recovery strategies. But the legacy of the pandemic and repeated lockdowns continues to affect some children and learners' education and development.

Drawing on evidence from more than 100 inspections carried out in the summer term and multiple focus groups with inspectors, the reports set out how early years settings, schools and further education and skills providers are helping children and learners catch up, while dealing with the ongoing challenges of COVID.

Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

It's clear that education providers are responding to the ongoing challenges of COVID with creativity and resilience. But the pandemic and lockdowns created some distinct problems, which are taking time to shift. Some young children are still behind in their development; older children are experiencing higher levels of exam anxiety than usual, and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff have been exacerbated across all phases of education.

I'm also concerned that some learners in a small minority of further education and skills providers are still not receiving sufficient classroom teaching or off-the-job training. This is narrowing their opportunities to gain practical skills and limiting their social engagement, which could have serious consequences on their readiness for the workplace.

Early years

Young children's communication and language development continues to be affected. An increased number of children have been referred for additional support, but they are having to wait months, sometimes up to a year, for

specialist help such as speech and language therapy.

Many children still lack confidence in social settings. Some have taken longer to settle into nursery or with a childminder than would have been expected pre-pandemic.

During the pandemic, children missed out on going to playgrounds and soft-play areas. As a result, some have not developed the gross motor skills they need. To help children catch up, many providers have thought about how they can use outside space and encourage more physical activity.

Fewer children are ready for the move up to Reception than would otherwise have been expected pre-COVID. Some are still not where they should be in terms of developing independent self-care skills, such as using the toilet and dressing. And because some providers have focused on getting children ready for Reception, it is possible that younger children have missed out on their own learning and development opportunities.

Providers also told inspectors that the take up of funded places for 2-year-olds remains lower than usual. And they said that financial pressures and staffing constraints mean they were not actively promoting places.

Staff recruitment and retention is a persistent issue for the early years sector. Many providers continue to report difficulties in recruiting high-quality staff due to the relatively low pay the sector offers. In a few cases, providers have had to recruit unqualified staff to meet the legal requirement regarding the number of staff per children, per setting.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions being lifted since February, most providers have maintained some restrictions because they do not want to risk staff illness. Parents continue to drop off and pick up at the doorstep, with some telling inspectors they didn't know they could ask to enter the provider's premises. These restrictions potentially create barriers between parents and staff.

Schools

Schools are continuing to work hard to help pupils catch up. However, some pupils are still not as ready for the next stage of their education as they would usually be, particularly children in Reception who had limited pre-school experience.

Inspectors also saw that the pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Schools with strong systems in place before COVID-19 are continuing to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. But the pandemic has delayed some pupils receiving support from external or specialist services.

School staff noticed higher levels of anxiety around exams than in pre-pandemic times, as pupils prepared to sit external tests for the first time in more than 2 years. While inspectors saw good practice in schools that balanced helping pupils to revise their subject knowledge with preparing them

for exams, in some schools the curriculum was being overly narrowed to focus on exam topics, which may affect pupils' readiness for the next stage.

More schools are using tutoring programmes than in the spring and autumn terms, with most opting for the school-led route. Some schools are using the National Tutoring programme to fund their own staff to act as tutors, rather than employing external tutors.

In the summer term, school leaders said that fewer pupils were absent from school because of COVID-19 compared with the spring term. Although some leaders have seen an increase in pupil absence due to families taking rescheduled holidays.

Further education and skills (FES)

Providers have continued to use creative strategies to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and close gaps in learners' practical skills and theoretical knowledge.

A small number of providers have retained or reverted to remote learning. In some industries, and for adults studying for professional qualifications, online learning can have a useful and flexible role to play. However, for younger learners, and those on vocational courses, remote learning narrows opportunities to gain and practice skills. For instance, it is very difficult to teach brick laying or carpentry remotely.

By learning remotely, some learners are also missing out on valuable socialisation and opportunities to develop work-ready behaviours and attitudes. This limited interaction with peers and staff can have a negative impact on learners' experiences and outcomes, and leave them unprepared for their next steps.

Challenges remain for apprentices. While difficulties securing work and training are easing, sectors that were hardest hit by the pandemic continue to be affected, such as health and social care. Some apprentices are not completing meaningful tasks, or are observing rather than gaining practical experience, while the pressures on businesses following the pandemic mean others are not being released for off-the-job training. The disruption to learning has also seen many apprentices remain on their programmes beyond the planned end-point, due to them not being ready for assessment.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges in recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. This is largely due to salaries being incomparable to industry, particularly in sectors like construction and engineering. In some cases, the pandemic has prompted staff to re-consider their careers.

The level of exam anxiety was noted to be higher than pre-pandemic, particularly among learners sitting high-stakes assessments for the first time.

Some providers have compressed English and maths timetabling to increase time for learners to catch up on vocational skills. This does not leave enough

time for learners to make good progress in English and maths. And because of business pressures, some employers have decided only to recruit apprentices who already hold the required English and maths qualifications.

The number of adult learners was already decreasing pre-pandemic, but this decline has accelerated. In some cases, courses have closed. Elsewhere though, some providers reported an increased interest in employability courses as adult learners looked to re-train or move jobs.

Many learners with high needs have received extensions to their programmes to help them take part in activities they missed out on at the height of the pandemic. Personal development has been slow to recover and some learners have experienced increased mental health difficulties, or have regressed in their social skills.

Action taken following dry conditions in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex

Following a dry spring, river flows and some groundwater levels are 'below normal' in parts of Essex, East Suffolk and the Broadland rivers area*.

Prolonged dry weather is a natural event. It occurs as a result of low rainfall for an extended period of time. Once prolonged dry weather is declared actions are taken to minimise impacts on the environment and the risk of further deterioration.

Impacts of this weather are already being felt in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex with river flows becoming lower, causing problems for wildlife and river users.

The Environment Agency has been monitoring the situation and reviewing the range of dry weather indicators, including groundwater levels, river flows and soil conditions.

It also has teams ready to respond to reports of low dissolved oxygen levels in watercourses to help protect fish populations.

Abstraction licence holders in the affected areas may receive notice to restrict the amount of water they can take. This may include taking reduced quantities or only abstracting at specific times of the day, depending on local circumstances.

Alison Parnell, a drought manager for Environment Agency in East Anglia, said:

We continue to monitor our key river, groundwater and reservoir

sites using telemetry, and are liaising with water companies to understand any emerging concerns.

We are also working with farmers, businesses and other abstractors to manage water availability and ensure that they get the water they need to be resilient while maintaining our protection of the environment.

We are closely monitoring the developing incident and produce regular reports on the water situation, available on www.gov.uk.

In the lead up to this announcement the Environment Agency has been monitoring weather forecasts, hydrology, and the impacts on the environment.

Field teams have been busy sampling to check for the impacts of dry weather on the ecology.

We have also been meeting with water companies so we can share information and request action to be taken in accordance with their drought plans.

We can all do our part to use water wisely and manage this precious resource. If you are using water in the garden, take some simple steps such as fitting a trigger to your hose or using a bucket to wash the car or water plants. For more water saving tips visit [Waterwise](#).

If people see any environmental impacts due to dry weather, such as fish in distress, please report it to the Environment Agency 24/7 on 0800 80 70 60.

Additional information:

- *The River Wensum and River Bure are not currently in a Prolonged Dry Weather location despite being part of the Broadland River area.
- The last time East Anglia moved to prolonged dry weather status was in 2020 for the Cam and Ely Ouse area.
- The last time East Anglia declared drought was in May 2019. This drought resulted from three years of exceptionally dry weather across the southeast. It was declared as an environmental drought.
- The Environment Agency's regulatory role involves issuing and regulating abstraction licences and drought permits, imposing abstraction restrictions and scrutinising water company drought plans to ensure they are robust and fit for purpose.
- Water companies plan for the expected increase in demand and reduction in effective rainfall over the warmer months and decide themselves on proposing drinking water restrictions. We work closely with the companies to ensure they follow their drought plans.