

Press release: Applications open to create 1,600 new special free school places

More than 1,600 new special free school places will be created across England as 19 local authorities invite applications to run new special free schools.

It will mean 19 new schools, providing high quality provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities, will be built through the government's ambitious free schools programme that provides choice, innovation and higher standards for parents.

Organisations ranging from successful Multi-Academy Trusts to specialist charitable organisations can now apply to the 19 local authorities, setting out how they will be able to meet the specification for each project. Criteria have been developed by the local authorities, in conjunction with the Department for Education, to ensure they meet the needs of each local community and provide much-needed places for special educational needs and disability (SEND) pupils.

Among the special free school specifications published today are:

- A 200-place school with both early years and post-16 places for pupils between the ages of three and 19 in the Borough of Bedford.
- A 100-place school with post-16 provision for pupils between the ages of five to 19 with complex communication and interaction needs, Autism spectrum disorder and other social and mental health needs in Doncaster.
- A 125-place school for pupils between the ages of four and 16 with social communication needs and Autism spectrum disorder in Hampshire.
- A 150-place school with early years and post-16 provision for pupils between the ages of two to 19 with Autism spectrum disorder in Croydon.

Schools System Minister, Lord Nash, said:

Free schools are providing many good new school places in response to the needs of communities across the country. This process will give local authorities the chance to identify expert organisations with proven track records in SEND provision to run special schools that will help hundreds of children fulfil their potential.

The new schools are part of the most-recent wave of free schools approved in April, and are separate from government plans to open 30 free schools in partnership with local authorities – as recently announced by Education Secretary, Justine Greening. Since 2015, the government has committed £5.8 billion of basic need funding to deliver the school places needed by 2020. Applications close on 24 November.

Notes to Editors

- On 12 April 2017, the Department for Education announced the approval of 131 new free schools, including approval of plans to launch special free school competitions in Bedford, Blackpool, Bradford, Cheshire East, Croydon, Doncaster, Enfield, Essex, Hampshire, Havering, Herefordshire, Hounslow, Manchester, Portsmouth, Redbridge, Sheffield, South Gloucestershire, Suffolk and Sunderland.
- More than 9 in 10 free schools have been approved in areas where a need for more school places has already been identified, and the remainder have been created by local communities deciding they wanted more choice. Free schools are ensuring more parents have access to a good local school place for their children.
- There are currently 346 open free schools, 38 studio schools and 48 university technical colleges, which will provide over 234,000 places when at capacity.

DfE enquiries

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[Press release: UK Ambassador: we are a proud partner of the Lebanese army](#)

Within the framework of the High Level Steering Committee, British ambassador to Lebanon Hugo Shorter and John Rath representing the American Ambassador, accompanied by UK and the US Defence attachés Chris Gunning and Daniel Mouton, met with the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces General Joseph Aoun to discuss the Land Border Security Project.

The UK is a proud partner of the LAF, and we want to help the LAF build on its record of success. In recent months, we have seen the LAF conduct successful and complex counter-terrorism operations, make significant progress on securing Lebanon's borders with Syria, and protect Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees from the dreadful impacts of the Syrian civil war.

As we approach Army Day, we celebrate the fact that this is an army that has transformed itself over the last decade, and which commands not only the respect of the Lebanese, but also of the international community. Today the LAF is capable of exercising control and ensuring security over all Lebanese territory.

Only a strong state, with a strong LAF at its heart, can over the long term guarantee Lebanon's stability, its democracy and its model of coexistence. Only the LAF can act with the consent of all the Lebanese people, and in line with the Constitution and relevant Security Council resolutions. The UK supports the LAF because it is the only legitimate defender of Lebanon.

Part of our discussions today also touched on the importance of human rights and accountability within the LAF, as a key ingredient of operational effectiveness and public respect. I am pleased that the LAF too see respect of human rights as a priority as part of its vision of being a modern, professional armed force.

News story: Independent report on Kent Oyster Farm published

Work by independent experts covers oyster farm development and navigation.

Independent experts commissioned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have produced a report looking at navigational risks in relation to oyster farm activity in the Whitstable area.

The report, which has been published on the Marine Management Organisation's website, concludes that the farm's operations are acceptable as a low risk to marine navigation. It recommends mitigation to reduce the risk even further, although acknowledging that the farm's owners have already adopted this in some instances.

Assessing navigational risk

In response to questions from members of the public the MMO [previously agreed to work with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and Trinity House](#) to assess how oyster racks in the area may affect local navigation and safety.

Marine licensing legislation

The MMO's investigations under its marine licensing remit are still ongoing.

The MMO has a difficult task in managing competing uses of the marine area. It has previously explained its remit and the legislation it enforces relating to this development, specifically under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

The MMO has committed to reviewing its guidance around marine licence exemptions to take into account learning from this issue.

News story: Distinguishing between marking errors and differences of opinion

Ofqual has today (27 July 2017) published [research](#) that shows examiners were able to distinguish between marking errors and legitimate differences of opinion when conducting reviews of marking last summer. The analysis follows the introduction of new rules in 2016 to ensure reviewers only change marks when there is an error, and ensure fairness for all students.

Data published today shows that marks were unchanged following a review in more than half of cases requested by schools and colleges in 2016. Analysis of a sample of cases where marks were changed, including some of the most difficult cases to judge, reveals that examiners acted consistently with the new rules in a clear majority of cases, such that only marking errors were corrected. In a small number of cases a change was made even though there was no error in the original marking, and in a very small number of cases errors were not corrected. The reasons for this, including unusual responses, examiner error and mark schemes, are discussed further in the report.

Commenting on today's publications, Sally Collier, Chief Regulator said: "It is pleasing to see that our new rules were used in many cases in the way we intended last summer. There will always be a period of adjustment following any change, and we are working with exam boards to identify what can be done this year to be even more confident that students are getting the results their performance deserves.

"Of course, the first best solution remains for original marking to be as good as it can be. Our findings provide some useful information here too, and we believe that improvements are being made through the comprehensive redesign and introduction of new GCSEs and A levels."

New data have also been published today that show the extent of mark and grades changes in 2016 resulting from reviews of marking and moderation by subject and centre-type. These show that the incidence and extent of mark and grade changes varied by subject, explained by factors including the degree of non-exam assessment, structure of the qualification or nature of the assessment (objective vs subjective).

A further piece of research, also published today, provides an insight into the approaches of exam board moderators when considering centre-marked assessments. It identifies several areas for improvement, including factors that may influence their decisions. However, overall, the evidence is of consistency in their approaches to moderation.

The 4 documents published today are:

1. [‘Evaluation of Reviews of Marking and Moderation 2016: Study and survey’](#)
2. [‘Reviews of marking and moderation resulting in grade changes of 2 grades or more: Summer 2016 examination series’](#)
3. [‘An exploratory investigation into how moderators of non-examined assessments make their judgements’](#)
4. [‘Reviews of marking and moderation: subject level analyses’](#)

Background

Ofqual is introducing changes to the systems schools and colleges use to challenge GCSE, AS and A level results in England to make them clearer, more consistent, and fairer for all students.

Among [several reforms in summer 2016](#) we changed the rules so that mark changes would only be permitted where there was a marking error. This reflected earlier research that showed inconsistency in how marks were being reviewed, giving those who requested a review an unfair advantage.

In [spring 2017](#), we announced that we would in future give schools and colleges a second opportunity to challenge GCSE, AS level, A level and project results if they continue to have concerns about marking or moderation errors. This adds to their existing right to appeal results on the grounds that an exam board hasn't followed its own procedures.

[News story: Migration Advisory Committee \(MAC\) commissioned by government](#)

The Home Office has today commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to report on the impact on the UK labour market of the UK's exit from the European Union and how the UK's immigration system should be aligned with a modern industrial strategy.

Responding to the commission the Chair of the MAC, Professor Alan Manning, said:

This is an important and extensive commission and the MAC welcome the opportunity to contribute to the UK's knowledge base in this

area at this critical time.

The MAC will research and analyse the areas covered by the questions using all available data sources, using both internal and external analysts and expertise.

We are keen to work with stakeholders to explore the issues encompassed by this commission and will shortly produce a call for evidence setting out how stakeholders can get involved.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) is an independent public body that provides transparent, independent and evidence-based advice to the government on migration issues.

The government has set a deadline of September 2018 to report back on the commission. The MAC will consider producing interim responses for the government to ensure the report can support policy development

In the next few weeks the MAC will produce a call for evidence, which will be available on the MAC website. The MAC will engage with government, business, trade unions and other interested parties to ensure a high quality evidence based response to the commission.