

Press release: New Council Tax guide protects most vulnerable households

If you are disabled, have a health condition or are a carer you could be overpaying Council Tax and not even know it, according to a new public guide.

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For the first time the government has produced a [practical guide](#) highlighting all the Council Tax discounts and exemptions to ensure families aren't paying more than their fair share of Council Tax.

Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP, said:

Council Tax is a vital source of funding for local government, supporting most of the day-to-day services we all use and rely on.

However, no one should be paying more than their fair share. We want to help people keep more of what they earn which is why we've produced this easily-accessible guide explaining the discounts and exemptions available – many of which people may never even knew existed.

Full exemptions include when an entire household are full-time students, if a person has recently moved into hospital or a care home or if all people in a household have a mental impairment, including conditions like dementia, or are receiving live-in care.

Other advice the guide contains includes family or 'granny' annexes discounts, support for those in hardship, the armed forces, if you live on your own and advice when someone passes away. The guide also explains how you can challenge your Council Tax band.

Council Tax in England is 6% lower in real terms than it was in 2010, and local taxpayers have a legal right to veto excessive tax increases.

News story: Education Secretary calls for an end to low value degrees

Universities and higher education providers offering poor value degrees are letting down thousands of students and costing the taxpayer millions, the Education Secretary has warned today (26 May).

Damian Hinds has called on institutions to drop or revamp courses delivering poor value for money as new analysis shows that on more than one in 10 of all courses, there is a 75% chance that graduates won't be earning enough five years after leaving university to start making loan repayments.

Every subject – from creative arts to medicine – has the potential to generate a positive return, but the percentage of courses where the loan repayment threshold is not met five years after graduation varies from subject to subject. For example, for psychology it's more than a fifth of courses and for creative arts it is almost 40% of courses. Graduates must start repaying their loans when they earn £25,000 or over – a threshold that was raised by the government in April 2018.

Mr Hinds has recognised the need for degrees to be both high value to students and the economy, and urged them to make sure they are using the unprecedented levels of data available to them to make sure they are picking a course and institution that is right for them – also considering alternatives like technical education or new high-quality apprenticeships.

The same analysis identified around 20 providers where at least three quarters of all students are still not earning enough to start repaying their loans five years after graduation. While research shows a university degree can improve a person's earning potential and employability, Mr Hinds believes the figures should be a 'wake up call' for universities about their responsibility to deliver the best outcome for students.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Our university sector is world class and we are rightly proud of it. Its reputation is built on trust and when young people apply to go to university it is based on the assumption is that a degree will set them up for a bright future – but today's analysis shows that isn't always the case.

The opportunity to study at university should be open to anyone with the talent and potential to benefit from higher education. With students and taxpayers sharing the cost of higher education it's right that we challenge those institutions which could appear to be more focused on 'getting bums on seats' than getting students into high quality courses worth paying for.

That's why I want universities to be brave and ask themselves if they're running courses that really help students gain the skills they need for the workforce of tomorrow – if they're not they should improve them or end them. But if universities think other options like apprenticeships or technical education are a better fit for a student, they should give young people that advice rather than put them on a course that isn't providing what they need for a bright future.

Around 45% of the value of outstanding post-2012 student loans are not expected to be repaid, which comes at a significant cost to the taxpayer.

Mr Hinds says it isn't right that institutions benefit from student loan funded fee income for delivering poor value courses, as students and taxpayers are the ones that suffer.

Research shows that graduate salary is an important driver when it comes to choosing a university. Universities have benefitted from a sustained period of investment and growth, but this increase in capacity has not always been in those areas that deliver most benefit for students or society.

Mr Hinds' comments come as an independent panel conducting a review into post-18 education and funding finalises its recommendations to government.

The Prime Minister has previously made clear that value for money will be a key part of the government's review, which will identify how to help young people make more effective choices between different study routes after sixth-form or college.

As the new universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) has made it a condition of registration that a higher education provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students. The OfS has the power to intervene where a provider is not meeting this criterion and impose sanctions, where in the most serious cases could include deregistration.

Press release: Housing Minister announces boost for families and high streets as planning red tape is axed

Thousands of homeowners will be able to extend their properties quickly and easily without the need for a full planning application.

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Thousands of homeowners will be able to extend their properties quickly and easily without the need for a full planning application, under rules made permanent today (25 May 2019).

In a wide-reaching package of reforms, rights allowing larger home extensions have been made permanent, following its introduction in 2013.

In addition, restrictive planning rules have also been axed, which will ensure business owners can respond quickly to changing trends on the high street.

Today's news gives homeowners certainty to make plans to extend their homes this summer without a full planning application, while providing consideration of the impact on neighbours.

Under the rules, homeowners can put a single-storey rear extension on their property of up to 6 metres for terraced or semi-detached homes, or 8 metres for detached homes.

Over 110,000 extensions have been completed since 2014 under the previously temporary rules. Today's announcement will mean more families can ensure their homes meet their specific needs.

Housing Minister Kit Malthouse MP said:

These measures will help families extend their properties without battling through time-consuming red tape.

By making this permitted development right permanent, it will mean families can grow without being forced to move.

This is part of a package of reforms to build more, better, faster and make the housing market work – and sits alongside our drive to deliver 300,000 homes a year by the mid 2020s.

This step will make it easier for families to build outwards rather than go through the arduous process of moving to a larger home.

As part of the reforms, permitted development rights will also give business owners on the high street greater flexibility as they respond to changing trends in customer spending.

Shops will now be able to change to office space without the need for a full planning application, bringing skilled professionals and their disposable income back to the high street and help support neighbouring traders by increasing local footfall.

High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP said:

This fantastic news joins our £675 million [Future High Streets Fund](#) and our High Streets Task Force in ensuring our country's high streets are fit to thrive not just now, but in the years to come.

Giving greater certainty to property owners and the wider industry, it will also help businesses adjust to the changing needs of the consumer.

The move builds upon changes to the law which allow business owners to change the use of buildings from takeaways to new homes without undergoing a full planning application.

To help deliver a greater mix of uses on the high street, the changes also allow the temporary change of use from high street uses such shops, offices, and betting shops to certain community uses such as a library or public hall.