

News story: Tech experts to provide National Centre for Computing Education

Pupils up and down the country will benefit from the UK's first National Centre for Computing Education led by British experts, it can be revealed today.

A consortium made up of STEM Learning, the British Computing Society and the Raspberry Pi Foundation, has been chosen as the provider for the project, which is backed by £84million of government investment.

The Centre will work with the University of Cambridge, while Google will also support the project with a further £1million.

Minister for School Standards Nick Gibb said:

As our digital industry makes an increasingly significant contribution to our economy, it is important that our computer science teachers are trained to teach the latest digital skills, ensuring young people benefit from a high quality computing education.

The new computer science GCSE has more challenging content such as computer programming and coding. This new National Centre for Computing Education, led by some of the UK's leading tech experts, will give teachers the subject knowledge and support they need to teach pupils the new computing curriculum. This is part of this Government's drive to raise academic standards so that pupils have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in our outward looking and dynamic economy.

The Centre will start working with schools across England later this year, improving teaching and driving up participation in computer science at GCSE and A-Level.

The Centre will operate virtually through a national network of up to 40 school-led computing hubs to provide training and resources to primary and secondary schools, and an intensive training programme for secondary teachers without a post A-Level qualification in computer science.

Paul Fletcher, Chief Executive, British Computer Society said:

It is vital that every child in every school has access to world-leading computing education, and this means that every computing teacher has access to the support that they need. The subject of

Computing was only introduced four years ago and is still new for schools and that's why it's important to build on the energy and enthusiasm of the many teachers who are already committed to the success of this subject. We are delighted to form part of the consortium and to continue to work with the community of Computing teachers.

Yvonne Baker, Chief Executive, STEM Learning said:

High quality, knowledgeable teaching of computer science is the cornerstone of achieving our aims. Evidence tells us this is fundamental to raising attainment and driving up participation, particularly for girls. We warmly welcome this investment which will be instrumental in preparing young people for the increasingly technological world they will grow up in, and strengthening the UK economy.

Philip Colligan, Chief Executive, Raspberry Pi said:

This level of investment is unprecedented anywhere in the world for teacher training in the field of computing and computer science. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the way that computing and computer science is taught.

Press release: Tax rules for second-homes to be reviewed by ministers

A business rates 'loophole' which could be costing English councils millions in lost Council Tax is to be reviewed by ministers with a consultation launched today (7 November 2018).

Currently, second-home owners pay Council Tax on their properties including when the property is available to rent infrequently during the year.

Properties are valued for business rates when owners declare their property is available to let as 'holiday accommodation' for 140 days or more in a year.

Any property registered for business rates, rather than Council Tax, is likely to qualify for small business rate relief. This provides 100% relief from business rates, so no tax is due on properties with a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

Around 47,000 holiday lets in England are liable for business rates, of which circa 96% have rateable values of £12,000 or less. Currently there is no requirement for evidence to be produced that a property has actually been commercially let.

Genuine businesses can claim the relief to which they are entitled. However, the government is aware of concerns that owners of second homes which do not fall into this category, could exploit the system by not paying Council Tax, whilst still using local services.

Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP said:

We're aware of concerns that the current arrangements for valuing second homes for business rates and claiming relief do not provide strong enough protections against abuse.

We are seeking views on whether we should strengthen the checks already in place to ensure second-home owners have to pay Council Tax, while ensuring genuine holiday let businesses are able to demonstrate they are eligible for business rates relief.

The consultation will seek views on whether the current criteria should be strengthened to ensure second home owners are contributing to the local economy through the proper payment of council tax, or, for those genuinely renting out their property and supporting tourism, business rates.

View the [consultation](#) on this website – it will run until 16 January 2019.

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Press release: PM call with President Ghani: 7 November 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's firm commitment to Afghanistan and congratulated President Ghani on the achievement of the first Afghan-led and secured election since 2001, praising the courage of the Afghan people who voted. The Prime Minister and President Ghani agreed that the elections mark an important step forward.

The Prime Minister commended President Ghani for his offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the leaders agreed that the prospects for peace are more promising than they have been for a number of years. The Prime Minister pledged the UK's continuing support for a political settlement.

Both the Prime Minister and President Ghani paid tribute to the sacrifices made by UK and Afghan military personnel in Afghanistan and their continuing efforts in pursuit of peace.