

News story: Fairer pay for criminal defence advocates in legal aid cases

The reformed Advocates' Graduated Fee Scheme (AGFS) will ensure that pay better reflects the actual work being done by criminal defence advocates and that advocates are being fairly remunerated for work in more complex cases.

The changes will bring the scheme in line with modern practices, taking into account the fact that more and more evidence is submitted electronically.

The process of determining fees will be simplified so that advocates can better understand how they will be paid for their work before they take on a case.

The new scheme is part of ongoing reforms to deliver a modern and effective justice system, whilst ensuring that legal aid is available in cases where it is most needed.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said:

These changes will create a simpler and more modern pay system for defence advocates in legal aid-funded criminal cases.

We have listened to the views of legal professionals to ensure that advocates will be paid in a way that better reflects the reality of the work they do.

The government previously consulted on the fee proposals and has taken on feedback from professionals to help shape the scheme.

Significant changes have been made to the original proposals to ensure that the vital contribution of junior barristers and solicitor advocates is better recognised in the new scheme.

The changes will come into effect on 1 April 2018 and will keep spend on fees at the current level, so that the reforms come at no additional cost to the tax payer.

Notes

The [AGFS consultation response](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

Speech: Education ministers from across the Commonwealth meet in Fiji

Thank you Dr Mohamed. And thank you also to those fellow Education Ministers I have had the opportunity to meet over the last few days. I think this has been a very successful conference. I would like to congratulate the Secretary General and the Fijian Government for hosting a very successful conference. It has been wonderful for me to have had so many productive, interesting and warm conversations with fellow ministers, in meetings and at the very successful receptions that have been held throughout the course of the conference. I have really valued the opportunity to learn about other education systems and to discuss so many shared challenges that we all face across the Commonwealth. I am sure that many of us will stay in touch in future and continue to support each other where we can.

The UK government is looking forward to welcoming your Heads of Government to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April. We will discuss shared challenges, and move forward – I hope – renewed, and revitalised after that conference.

These international gatherings are helpful in shaping shared policy objectives and working collectively to overcome challenges. For example, the Millennium Development Goals focused minds on universalising access to education. And now, the Sustainable Development Goals are going further.

In recent years, great strides have been made across the world. It should not be forgotten that in 1990 there were 1.8 billion people living in absolute poverty. This has been reduced over those years since by a billion. But, there is still much more to do. As our Foreign Secretary wrote recently:

Look at those countries where population is growing the fastest, where unemployment is highest, and where the tensions are greatest, and without exception you will find a common factor: female illiteracy.

Boris Johnson was correct when he went on to state that this is both a moral outrage and 'contrary to the interests of world peace, prosperity, health and happiness.

Globally, 130 million girls are not in school. So I would urge member states to commit to work together and individually to ensure 12 years of quality education for all by 2030.

But we must be more ambitious than seeking universal access. We must turn our attention to ensuring pupils receive the high-quality education they deserve.

Of those pupils in school in low income countries, 90% are not on track to master the basics of maths, reading and writing by the end of primary school.

Raising school standards for pupils from all backgrounds has been the driving force behind the government reforms in my country since 2010. The government's mission is to provide pupils with the knowledge-rich education that will prepare them for the rigours and opportunities of the 21st century.

Core academic subjects have returned to the heart of the secondary curriculum and we have pursued evidence-based approaches to teaching, raising standards for all. At the same time, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers has narrowed both at primary and secondary schools in England since 2010.

In education, there is nothing more important to spreading opportunity than ensuring all pupils are taught to read effectively. Figures from the UK show that pupils who are reading well by age 5 are 6 times more likely than their peers to be on track by age 11 in reading, and 11 times more likely to be on track in mathematics.

But, in the years just before we came into government in 2010, we knew something was wrong with the way our primary schools taught reading. England was stagnating in the international league tables and the international data also showed a wider gap between top and bottom performers than in most other countries, leading to England being known for its 'long tail of underachievement'.

And data from 2012 showed that we were the only OECD country where the maths and reading abilities of our 16-24 year olds was worse than that of our 55 to 65 year olds. A misguided move away from evidence-based approaches to teaching children to read was stifling opportunity for too many children.

For decades, the overwhelming weight of international evidence – including the influential longitudinal study from Clackmannanshire in Scotland – pointed to systematic phonics as the most effective way to teach children to read.

Phonics teaches children to associate letters with sounds, providing pupils with the code to unlock written English. And despite the evidence in favour of this approach – a traditional approach – the government's phonics reforms were controversial and met with widespread opposition from teaching unions and other vested interests.

All primary schools in England are now required by law to use phonics as they teach pupils to read. But more controversially, the government introduced the Phonics Screening Check in 2012. This is a short test comprising a list of 40 words that 6-year-old children read to their teacher at the end of year 1.

The proportion of pupils passing the Phonics Check has increased every year since it was introduced by us in 2012. In 2012, the first year of the Phonics Check, just 58% of 6 year olds reached the pass mark of 32 out of the 40 correctly read words. So over (he doesn't say over, he just says 40% but given that over is statistically correct are we fine to just leave this in the text version?) 40% were failing. This year, 81% of 6-year-olds reached that standard, with 92% of children reaching that standard by the end of year

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This year, 154,000 more 6 year olds were on track to be fluent readers than in 2012. Last year, 147,000 more 6 year olds were on track compared to 2012.

And the success of this policy has been confirmed by the international PIRLS results (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). The international study of 9-year-olds' reading ability in 50 countries showed that England has risen from joint 10th place in 2011 to joint 8th place in 2016, thanks to a statistically significant rise in our average score.

But more importantly, these tests show that we are dealing with the 'long tail of underachievement' that has stifled opportunity. The PIRLS results show that reading has improved for pupils from all backgrounds, but it is the low-performing pupils who are gaining most rapidly.

The report found that performance in the Phonics Check was strongly predictive of PIRLS performance, vindicating the government's drive to universalise this evidence-based approach to teaching. The PIRLS national report for England states that: And I quote,

Pupils who scored full marks in the phonics check were also the highest scoring group in PIRLS 2016, with an average overall PIRLS score of 617. In contrast, pupils who did not reach the 'expected standard' in the Year 1 phonics check perform below England's overall average, with lower phonics check scores being associated with decreasing average PIRLS scores.

So that is why our government is determined to go even further and see more pupils reach the expected standard at age 6. And if I could just quote the New Zealand Minister's earlier quote: "We have gone so far, we're going to go further still."

The government has also faced-down much opposition to the drive to increase the proportion of pupils studying core academic GCSEs at age 16. The English Baccalaureate, that we introduced as a performance measure, requires pupils to study GCSEs in English, maths, at least two sciences, either history or geography, and a foreign language.

Schools are measured now on the proportion of their pupils entering GCSEs in all 5 categories, and on the attainment of their pupils in these subjects.

Since 2010 – following a long-term decline in pupils taking these core academic subjects – there have been sharp increases in most of these subjects. For example, the proportion of pupils taking the science component of the EBacc has risen from 63% to 91%, and the proportion studying history or geography has risen from 48% to 77%.

Nationally, nearly two-fifths of pupils are entered for the EBacc. This is up from just over one-fifth in 2010. But again there is still much more to do, to reach the government's ambitious target of 90% of pupils studying towards

the full suite of EBacc GCSEs by 2025.

Since 2010, the proportion of pupils studying a language to GCSE has risen from 40% to 47% and we're (remove as got "are" after) are determined to raise participation in languages much further in the years to come, particularly as Britain raises its eyes to the opportunities that await post-Brexit.

Evidence supports the government's desire to drive up participation in these core academic subjects. Evidence from the Sutton Trust found that pupils in a set of 300 schools that increased their EBacc entry, from 8% to 48%, were more likely to achieve good English and maths GCSEs, more likely to take an A level, or an equivalent level 3 qualification, and more likely to stay in post-16 education.

And these findings were corroborated by work carried out by the Institute of Education in London examining the effect that GCSE choice has on education post-16: And I quote,

Students pursuing an EBacc-eligible curriculum at 14-16 had a greater probability of progression to all post 16 educational outcomes, while taking an applied GCSE subject had the opposite effect. There were no social class differences in the advantages of pursuing an EBacc-eligible curriculum which suggests that an academically demanding curriculum is equally advantageous for working class as for middle class pupils.

And this year more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds entered the EBacc than at any point since the measure was created.

Again, there is still much more to do. Disadvantaged pupils remain almost half as likely to be entered for these subjects than their more affluent peers. But it is essential that all pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are given access to the core academic subjects that widen opportunities at post-16.

But the government is making progress in widening opportunities, whilst raising standards for all. Recent figures from national assessments that are published on a school by school basis taken at 11 and 16 reveal that the attainment gap has closed since 2011 at both primary and secondary schools, by 10.5% for primary and 10% for secondary.

Despite the controversy and claims from many in my country that the government's standards-raising policies would hurt the performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, in fact universalising access to evidence-based teaching methods and widening opportunities to study core academic subjects has been to the benefit of all, particularly those most in need.

There is more to do of course. There are still too many pupils not reading at the expected standard by age 6; and there are too many pupils – particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds – not being entered for the full suite of core academic GCSEs. But much progress has been made since 2010 and the government

– in step with teachers – is ambitious and determined to go further in the years to come.

Thank you very much chair for listening. I am very happy to answer any questions you may have on what has been a very controversial seven years of education reform in England.

Speech: Matt Hancock speaking at the CBI Annual Chinese New Year Dinner

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Or, as I hope translates to English: good evening Ambassador Liu and honoured guests.

It's a real privilege to be here tonight to celebrate Chinese New Year with you all and mark the arrival of the Year of the Dog.

I was born in the Year of the Horse; apparently Horses like me 'are either naturally good public speakers or have a habit of talking too much'.

I'm not sure which one applies to me – let me know in a couple of hours after I've finished...

It's an exciting time for relations between our two countries. As we open the next chapter in our golden era, look at the breadth of the cultural, political and economic partnership just over the past two months.

The V&A Museum has opened a brand new design gallery in Shenzhen, the first branch of a national British museum outside the UK.

The historic Terracotta Warriors are on display in Liverpool.

And the Prime Minister visited China to meet President Xi and Premier Li, signing over 9 billion pounds worth of commercial deals, building on the vast rise in trade over the past decade.

And as we look forward to the Year of the Dog, I want to take a moment to look at this vital relationship.

And especially, talk about how we can use the transformational power of new digital technology to make this golden era even more golden.

Making the most of change

The world around us is changing faster than ever before. And yet the blistering pace of change we're currently seeing is probably the slowest that

we'll see in the rest of our lifetimes.

And it's down to the incredible potential of new technologies, especially AI, which are constantly learning and getting exponentially better every single day.

Both China and Britain understand the potential of this fourth industrial revolution – and the need to relentlessly pursue new technology.

This forward thinking approach has been at the heart of our strengthening relationship over the last decade, and we've seen some remarkable hi-tech success stories over the past few months.

Huawei has recently announced a new commitment to 3 billion pounds of procurement from the UK. Gordon – thank you for your personal commitment and Huawei's vote of confidence in our world-leading tech industry. You provide the sort of leadership which is crucial for forging this sort of relationship.

Cambridge-based Astra Zeneca and Chinese tech giants Alibaba have announced they're coming together to build smart health systems, to help chest patients in China get vital treatment more quickly.

And the futuristic driverless pods used at Heathrow's Terminal 5 will soon be appearing in China thanks to a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding.

And it's not just tech firms and start-ups that are making the most of these opportunities.

Tech is revolutionising all sectors, whether through autonomous vehicles helping us drive more safely or machine learning making it easier for doctors to find cancerous cells, saving and improving lives.

The question that matters is how we can seize these opportunities of change to expand the potential to make both our nations more prosperous and better places to live.

Looking forward

We share this ambition and determination. AI pioneer and founder of Google China Dr Kai-Fu Lee recently said the UK is home to the 'hottest AI companies in the world, producing breakthroughs of global significance'.

Here, we're investing heavily in AI and robotics and are working hard to attract the best and brightest research talent from all over the world.

We are determined to be one of the leading places in the world for the development and deployment of AI. And we will share that global leadership with China.

Our universities – the second biggest destination for Chinese students – lie at the heart of this revolution.

But we cannot do this solely from our shores. To make the most of these

opportunities we will need to reach common understanding and co-operate on a wide range of issues. We must do this together.

And let's be frank. China and the UK come at some of the questions around, for example data protection, from very different philosophical backgrounds.

This makes it more important than ever that we understand each other – and respect each other's point of view – so we can come to the right solutions and work together.

We, for instance, have stronger protections for data and intellectual property. And while we ask China to respect these protections, we also respect China, and the progress we have seen in mutual understanding.

I was delighted that in December, we partnered with you in the first bilateral science and innovation strategy that China has developed jointly with another country.

This outlines, in the most advanced way yet, shared principles for intellectual property.

Agreements like this are crucial to unlocking the vast opportunities of co-operation and harnessing this technology for good.

We want to work ever closer with China, and other tech-minded countries around the world.

And I was delighted that during the Prime Minister's recent visit, agreements were signed on emerging technologies across the board – twelve in total, including space, smart cities and autonomous vehicles.

For this is the future. Countries that work with, not against, technology, will be the ones that flourish.

Flourishing as two vibrant, prosperous nations using technology to drive growth and make life better for our citizens and people across the world.

For if we have learnt one thing this past generation, then we have learnt this.

Free markets, in a proper framework, have been the most powerful force for good the world has ever seen – underpinned by the protection of property, openness to trade and sound finance.

China's journey is testament to this fact. Britain may have pioneered the market economy but, by God, China is proving it works.

You have lifted people from poverty more quickly than ever before in human history. We salute you.

And what's more, the free market rests on an understanding that business, done right, is a force for good in the world.

You can't run a good business unless you're solving problems for someone else. Solve them so well that they're prepared to pay you.

This is how prosperity is built. Our nations both understand this.

Conclusion

The UK and China are no strangers to changing history through our innovation and enterprise.

And as we celebrate the Year of the Dog, let's channel this spirit and just imagine what more we can do when we work together in the years ahead.

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[Press release: Updated plans for major A2 improvements published](#)

Under the plans, the Bean and Ebbsfleet junctions will both see their capacity increased, improving journeys, boosting safety and preparing the road network for the transformative growth expected in north Kent in the coming decades.

Both junctions will see enlarged junction roundabouts, with new lanes and enhanced slip roads. At Bean, a new bridge will be built over the A2 dual carriageway providing two extra lanes between the two junction roundabouts, which will also be improved, and an additional slip road for eastbound traffic joining the A2.

The Ebbsfleet junction improvements include enlarging the existing roundabouts, widening the road between the roundabouts to a dual carriageway and widening existing slip roads.

An initial consultation ran between January and March last year, before the preferred options were announced in August. Now, the public is being asked for views on the updated plans, which will form the basis of the project's formal planning application.

Highways England Senior Project Manager, Brian Gash said:

Bean and Ebbsfleet junctions serve Bluewater, Ebbsfleet International station and soon the new Garden City and these vital upgrades will help to make sure that the A2 stays fit for the future opportunities coming to Kent.

Demand is expected to grow by up to 200 per cent by 2027, so it is

vital that the final proposals we end up taking forward for planning permission are the best we can possibly make them. People's input into the consultation will help us make sure that they are. There are important decisions still to be made about each junction, so I'd encourage anyone with an interest – drivers, residents, business owners and visitors – to get involved.

The announcement has been welcomed by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, who have also contributed £45m funding for the project.

Ian Piper, Chief Executive of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, said:

With up to 15,000 new homes in Ebbsfleet Garden City, it is important that local infrastructure is improved to accommodate this growth. With our support for the proposed scheme for the two A2 junctions and a commitment from us to improve public transport in the area through a new and upgraded Fastrack service, we are investing to ensure traffic continues to flow.

Details on the plans and feedback forms will be available online from 21 February until 11:45pm on 4 April 2018 on the [scheme web page](#). These pages also include details of the Public Information Events that are taking place throughout February and March.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Devolution talks take a considerable step forward](#)

Discussions between the UK Government and the devolved administrations on the EU Withdrawal Bill have taken 'a considerable step forward', the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington MP said today after chairing the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting in the Cabinet Office.

Mr Lidington said the Scottish and Welsh Government Ministers had

acknowledged that the changes the UK Government is proposing to Clause 11 of the Bill represent good progress. Ministers agreed to meet again as soon as possible to try and reach an agreement.

Speaking after the Joint Ministerial Committee (European Negotiations) meeting in Whitehall, David Lidington said:

We had a constructive discussion today. We have not yet secured an agreement but have agreed to meet again in the very near future to crack this.

The Devolved Administrations acknowledged that the proposal we offered yesterday was a significant step forward.

We want to find an agreed way forward that respects and strengthens the devolution settlements and which also provides certainty for businesses and families as we depart the EU.

As we have always been clear, it is our intention that the Devolved Administrations will have more powers as a result of this process.

It is also very important that we protect the UK internal market and ensure that companies all across the UK are able to buy and sell freely.

Joint Ministerial Committee (EU negotiations) communiqué, 22 February 2018

The seventh Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) met today in 70 Whitehall. The meeting was chaired by the Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK Government:

- the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Rt Hon David Lidington MP
- the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Rt Hon David Davis MP
- the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
- the Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Alun Cairns MP
- the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon David Mundell MP

From the Welsh Government:

- Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford AM

From the Scottish Government:

- the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Michael Russell MSP

In the absence of Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive, a senior civil servant from the Northern Ireland Civil Service was in attendance.

The Chair opened the meeting by summarising the constructive bilateral engagement with the Scottish and Welsh governments, including political developments that had taken place since JMC(EN) last met. The Secretary of State for Exiting the EU provided an update on the previous rounds of negotiations with the EU. The Committee discussed forthcoming priorities, including the implementation period and the future relationship with the EU.

The Committee discussed the role of the Devolved Administrations in contributing to the process of developing the UK position in the next phase of negotiations with the EU on the future relationship. The Committee noted the engagement that had taken place between UK Government and Devolved Administration officials since the previous meeting to open discussion on the future economic and security partnerships. Engagement would continue with the aim of ensuring the Devolved Administrations were fully involved in developing the UK's negotiating position, while respecting the UK Government's role as negotiator.

The Committee discussed the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, including the proposal to amend clause 11. It was noted that progress had been made, but agreement had not yet been reached between the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government on the form of an amendment. Discussions on further detail would continue in the coming weeks.

The Committee discussed progress on common frameworks. Multilateral official level discussions had explored a range of areas where common frameworks may be required, including where legislative and non-legislative approaches could be appropriate. These discussions were ongoing.