

News story: Universities must do more to tackle ethnic disparity

Measures to improve outcomes for ethnic minority students in higher education were announced by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington and the Universities Minister Chris Skidmore today (1 February).

The measures are part of a bold cross-government effort to “explain or change” ethnic disparities highlighted by the Prime Minister’s Race Disparity Audit website, so people can achieve their true potential, whatever their background and circumstances.

Universities will now be held to account on how they will improve outcomes for underrepresented students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, through powers of the Office for Students, who will scrutinise institutions’ Access and Participation plans.

All universities will now have to publish data on admissions and attainment, broken down by ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background, to shine a spotlight on those making good progress and those lagging behind.

League table providers are being encouraged to present better information on social mobility and underrepresented groups, while the Office for Students is developing a new website to replace Unistats, which will have a greater focus on supporting those who are less likely to enter higher education.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington said:

I am determined that nobody experiences a worse outcome solely on the grounds of their ethnicity. Which is why the Government is making a clear and concerted effort, alongside higher education partners, to tackle these injustices.

These ethnic disparities in higher education cannot be tackled overnight, but I look forward to seeing meaningful and sustained progress in the higher education sector in the next few years.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

Universities need to reflect modern Britain, and ensure that everyone who has the potential, no matter their background or where they are from can thrive at university. I fully expect access and participation plans, which universities will be drawing up this year for implementation in 2020-21, to contain ambitious and significant actions to make sure we are seeing material progress in this space in the next few years.

It is one of my key priorities as the Universities Minister to ensure that I work with universities to highlight examples of best practice in widening not only access, but also we redouble our efforts to tackle student dropout rates. It cannot be right that ethnic minority students are disproportionately dropping out of university and I want to do more to focus on student experience to help ethnic minority students succeed at university.

Chris Millward, Director for Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students, said:

We are placing greater demands on universities to close the attainment gaps between ethnic minority students and others. We are also providing greater support for all universities to improve their practice in this area by funding collaborative projects and sharing effective practice. Our new approach to access and participation requires universities to improve their use of evidence and evaluation to identify the specific challenges faced by their own students, and to make interventions that work.

Where we see lower proportions of ethnic minority students continuing with their studies, achieving the best degree outcomes, or progressing into graduate jobs, we expect universities to have a measurable plan of action to address this. Today, we are publishing new research and guidance to support universities in effectively targeting their work for students from minority ethnic backgrounds, so they can make the changes that are needed if we are to achieve equality for all.

Professor Edward Byrne AC, President and Principal of King's College London:

Tackling race disparity outcomes is important and we welcome the Minister's visit to King's today. I am proud of the diverse international community we have here at King's, in 2017/18 49% of our undergraduates were from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds, and we have the fastest growing population of low-income students in the Russell Group.

Over the past seven years we have significantly reduced the gap between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and non-BAME students achieving a first or 2.1, from 11.1% in 2011/12 to 3.8% in 2017/18. It is great for our staff and students to have the opportunity to engage with Government at such a high level in a pro-active and meaningful way as at the roundtable this morning. I look forward to working further with Government, partners and communities to build on the work we're already doing to improve student attainment and staff progression, regardless of an individual's background.

The full list of measures announced today involves action by the Government, the university regulator and sector groups, including:

- Holding universities to account through their Access and Participation plans – scrutinised by the Office for Students who will use their powers to challenge institutions failing to support this.
- Putting pressure on university league tables to include progress in tackling access and attainment disparities – working with a wide range of experts, stakeholders and league table compilers.
- Providing better information for students – the Office for Students will develop a new website to replace the Unistats website and take the needs of disadvantaged students into account.
- Reducing ethnic disparities in research and innovation funding – UK Research and Innovation is commissioning evidence reviews on challenges for equality and diversity and how they can be addressed.
- Reviewing the Race Equality Charter – Advance HE will look at how the sector charter can best support better outcomes for both ethnic minority staff and students.
- Encouraging institutions to address race disparities in their workforce – using tools such as the Race at Work Charter and Race Equality Charter.
- Gathering evidence on what works to improve ethnic minority access and success – through the Evidence and Impact Exchange.

Figures from the [Race Disparity Audit](#) and Office for Students show that while record numbers of ethnic minorities are attending university, only 56% of black students achieved a First or 2:1 compared to 80% of their white peers in 2016/2017, and black students are the most likely to drop out of university. In the workforce, only 2% of academic staff are black. White British low-income males remain the least likely to attend higher education.

The Government is committed to working with higher education providers to do everything we can to ensure that a student's outcomes are determined by their hard work and talent – rather than their ethnic background.

Press release: Government announces new plans to protect treasure finds

- Changes would ensure more outstanding artefacts are acquired by museums for public display
- Consultation comes after record breaking number of discoveries in 2017

Plans to [widen the definition of treasure](#) so more archaeological finds can be protected for the nation have been outlined by the government today.

Heritage Minister Michael Ellis announced proposals that would allow more artefacts to be acquired by local and national museums and put on public display.

Under the plans, the definition will be changed so that finds worth more than £10,000 will be considered treasure and made available for acquisition by museums.

Currently artefacts over 300 years old, made of gold or silver or found with artefacts made of precious metals where an owner cannot be found, can be officially designated as treasure, and therefore become the property of the Crown. Treasure is then offered to local or national museums for public display.

Each year, dozens of items of national importance are believed to be lost to private sellers because they do not meet the treasure criteria or are sold by those who do not declare the find.

These include the 1,700 year old Roman era Crosby Garrett helmet that was found by a metal detectorist in 2010. Despite its archaeological importance, because the helmet was made of a copper alloy it did not meet the treasure criteria and was sold to a private collector for £2.3 million.

The proposals are to be [consulted](#) on and aim to clarify, improve and streamline the process for reporting treasure to ensure that museums can continue to acquire important finds for the nation.

There are currently no sanctions on someone who knowingly buys an unreported find and the growth in online markets has given opportunistic finders an outlet to sell unreported finds under the radar. The changes will also mean that the duty to report treasure will be extended to those acquiring it.

The measures would be the first major changes since the Treasure Act came into effect more than 20 years ago.

Heritage Minister Michael Ellis said:

The search for buried treasure has captivated people's imagination for centuries. And in recent years the number of finds has

continued to increase.

However some outstanding artefacts of great archaeological and cultural importance have been lost to private sellers simply because they do not meet the current criteria for treasure.

These new proposals will help our museums acquire these treasures and make it harder for nationally important finds to be sold for personal profit.

More items than ever are being discovered by treasure seekers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland with the number of finds increasing by over 1,500% since 1996.

The latest figures show that 2017 was a record-breaking year for treasure finds with a total of 1,267 items unearthed, including ancient Roman statues, Bronze Age rings and a Stuart pocket watch.

In the last 20 years, 13,000 finds have gone through the treasure process. Of these, over 30% are now in museums and can be enjoyed by millions of people each year.

Notes to editors

- [Full details of the consultation.](#)
- Since the medieval period, the law of treasure trove determined the future of objects of gold and silver that had been deliberately hidden with the intention of recovery. Where an owner or heir could not be identified, they became property of the crown. From the early 20th century it became common practice for the Government to reward the finder if the item was acquired by a museum.
- In 1997, the Treasure Act 1996 superseded this common treasure trove law and widened and clarified the definition of treasure. The Act gave the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport responsibility for the treasure process and retained the duty of the coroner to investigate possible treasure finds.
- Under the Act, finders have a legal obligation to report finds to the local coroner. Where a coroner declares an object treasure, it then becomes property of the Crown and is offered to museums. If the find is acquired by a museum, the finder and the landowner are eligible for a reward. This process is administered by the British Museum.

Image: Anglo-Saxon pendant (650-700), Unknown maker, [Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery](#)

Press release: Low Pay Commission publishes research on the effects of the minimum wage on employment and automation

The reports summarised below informed the Low Pay Commission's (LPC's) 2018 Report. The completed projects are from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and the London School of Economics (LSE). NIESR covered the impact of the National Minimum Wage and the National Living Wage on employment, hours and wages, and the LSE their effect on automation and offshoring.

The two ongoing projects are being conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex and Institute for Employment Studies (IES). The former concerns progression out of minimum wage jobs while the latter assesses the impact on employment and hours.

Low Pay Commissioner Professor Sarah Brown said:

The research we commission is vital for our understanding of the effects of the minimum wage rates we recommend. Over the last 20 years our commissioned research has helped us to successfully fulfil our remit of raising pay for the lowest-paid without causing unemployment. We are very grateful to the passion and commitment of academics from the UK and beyond who have put time and effort into what is a vital area of research, with a real impact on people's lives.

The Impact of the Introduction of the National Living Wage on Employment, Hours and Wages, National Institute of Economic and Social Research

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research investigated the impact of the introduction of the NLW in April 2016 and its subsequent uprating in April 2017, assessing the effects on pay and employment.

The authors concluded that the NLW had been a significant intervention in the labour market, raising the wages of the lowest paid, but that it had so far had little adverse impact on employment retention overall. Using Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings data, they found no robust effect on general employment retention or hours worked, but did find some tentative evidence of negative effects on employment retention in the retail industry and among women working part-time.

Minimum wage and the propensity to automate or offshore, London School of Economics

The main aim of this research project from the London School of Economics was to provide a deeper understanding of how minimum wage policies have affected automation and offshoring, focusing on the impact on those workers with low or no qualifications. This work built on a previous study – Lordan and Neumark 2018 – using US data that had found significant negative effects of minimum wage increases on employment via automation, especially in manufacturing.

Using the UK Labour Force Survey, the key findings were that minimum wage increases were followed by decreases in the share of employment in occupations defined as offshorable or automatable. However, these effects were modest – much smaller than in the US study – and were slightly stronger for automatable employment than offshorable. There were larger effects in manufacturing, particularly on automation. Here, a £1 increase in the minimum wage led to a 0.58 percentage point decline in the share of automatable jobs. The effects were largest for low-skilled men and older workers.

The study concluded by speculating about the future of jobs, suggesting that some low-skilled jobs were likely to continue (such as those in social care, childcare and hairdressing) while others were more likely to disappear completely (such as delivery drivers and security guards).

The NMW/NLW and progression out of minimum wage jobs in the UK – interim report, Institute for Social and Economic Research

The Institute for Social and Economic Research is investigating the impact of the NLW on earnings, pay differentials and pay progression. Final findings of this 18-month project will be presented in time for our 2019 Report. Consistent with previous research on progression, the interim study has so far found that, although around half of minimum wage workers left their jobs for higher pay in a given year, most (four-fifths) of these moved into higher-paying but still low-paid jobs. It found that worker characteristics and regional differences affected the likelihood of transitioning out of low pay. They will investigate this further this year and also examine the impact on pay differentials.

The impact of the minimum wage on employment and hours – interim report, Institute for Employment Studies

This Institute for Employment Studies project is an extended 18-month study investigating the impact of the NMW and NLW on employment and hours, including on young people. The interim report published today presents early findings from the analysis using the Labour Force Survey. This analysis found no significant effects on employment or hours as a result of NMW and NLW increases. Future analysis will focus on subgroups, such as women working part-time, and replicating the analysis using the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. The final research will be presented in time for our 2019 Report.

Notes

1. The Low Pay Commission will shortly be launching its Invitation to Tender for research for the 2019 Report and beyond. This call will include research that investigates: the impact on businesses, particularly prices, productivity, profits, investment, and business creation (start-ups) and destruction (failures); the impact of the minimum wage on employment and hours, focussing on any substitution of workers by age; the impact of the minimum wage on pay settlements and pay structures; and employer responses to the NLW.
2. The LPC's 2018 Report was published on gov.uk on Tuesday 27 November 2018.
3. The National Living Wage is the statutory minimum wage for workers aged 25 and over. It was introduced in April 2016 and has a target of 60% of median earnings by 2020, subject to sustained economic growth.
4. Different rates apply to 21-24 year olds, 18-20 year olds, 16-17 year olds and apprentices aged under 19 or in the first year of an apprenticeship.
5. Rates for workers aged under 25, and apprentices, are lower than the NLW in reflection of lower average earnings and higher unemployment rates. International evidence also suggests that younger workers are more exposed to employment risks arising from the pay floor than older workers. Unlike the NLW (where the possibility of some consequences for employment have been accepted by the Government), the LPC's remit requires us to set the rates for younger workers and apprentices as high as possible without causing damage to jobs and hours.
6. The National Living Wage is different from the UK Living Wage and the London Living Wage. Differences include that: the UK Living Wage and the London Living Wage are voluntary pay benchmarks that employers can sign up to if they wish, and are not legally binding requirements; the hourly rate of the UK Living Wage and London Living Wage is based on an attempt to measure need, whereas the National Living Wage is based on a target relationship between its level and average pay; the UK Living Wage and London Living Wage apply to workers aged 18 and over, the National Living Wage to workers aged 25 and over. The Low Pay Commission has no role in the UK Living Wage or the London Living Wage.
7. The Low Pay Commission is an independent body made up of employers, trade unions and experts whose role is to advise the Government on the minimum wage.
8. The nine Low Pay Commissioners are:
 - Bryan Sanderson
 - Professor Sarah Brown
 - Professor Richard Dickens
 - Kate Bell
 - Kay Carberry
 - Simon Sapper
 - Neil Carberry
 - Clare Chapman
 - Martin McTague

Press release: Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt visits Romania



Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt will be in Romania today (1 February) for talks with the Romanian President and Prime Minister.

Jeremy Hunt will discuss areas of co-operation, including tackling modern slavery, hybrid threats, as well as Brexit and future relations.

It is the Foreign Secretary's first official visit to Romania, where he will also host a discussion on media freedoms with local journalists.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

The UK and Romania are close allies on many issues, and that will continue when we leave the EU.

I'm looking forward to discussing, with President Iohannis and Prime Minister Dăncilă, how we develop our Strategic Partnership to help tackle security and hybrid threats.

While in Bucharest, I will also see an example of excellent UK-Romania economic co-operation with the opening of the London Stock Exchange office, making use of Romania's productive services sector.

Further information

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Press release: Gove kicks off Year of Green Action

- Year-long drive calls on young people to spearhead environmental action
- Government pledges £10million boost to connect children with nature
- Greener schools and more educational visits will be delivered through the funding

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will today call on people across the country to join together to protect the environment.

Speaking at [ZSL London Zoo](#) this evening, the Environment Secretary will launch the [Year of Green Action](#) – a year-long drive to get more people from all backgrounds involved in projects to improve the natural world.

He will also allocate £10 million to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds better access the natural environment, with grants awarded to projects that will create greener school grounds and increase the number of school visits to local parks, wildlife sites, care farms and National Parks.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will say:

I am delighted to launch the Year of Green Action. Over the next 12 months we will work with businesses and communities to create ways for people from all backgrounds to connect with nature, protect our environment, and contribute to restoring our natural world.

As the future stewards of our planet, children and young people have a vital role to play in this. The £10million boost outlined today will help ensure there are no barriers for young people to access the benefits of the natural world and importantly enable them to play their part in environmental protection.

During his speech, the Environment Secretary will call on everyone to play their part and back the Year of Green Action – from businesses to gardeners and government itself.

It will provide a focal point for organisations, individuals, communities and businesses to learn more about their environmental impact and take action to reduce it.

It comes as figures show [one in 10 children do not regularly spend time outdoors](#). The £10 million programme allocated today will help schools and education providers with the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils to design more outdoor-focused activities, boosting pupils' contact with nature and supporting their health and wellbeing.

The funding will also increase access to care farms, making it possible for

1.3million children and adults facing disadvantage or social exclusion to benefit from activities on a working farm.

A key pillar of the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) is to connect young people with nature and the projects announced today will be delivered by [Natural England](#) with a number of partners from spring 2019, with funding from the Department of Education.

As part of this programme, the National Centre for Social Research will also be carrying out research to understand how activities in nature impact pupils' mental health and engagement with school.

Commenting on the funding, Lord Blencathra, Natural England's Deputy Chair, said:

Connecting children with nature is one of the most important things we can do for them. It can boost their health, wellbeing and learning and give them a life-long love of the natural world that leads them to cherish and protect it forever.

I hope these projects will ensure that every child has the means of discovering the wonders of our wildlife.

The [#iwill4nature](#) initiative, charity [Step Up To Serve's](#) contribution to the Year of Green Action, will also launch today. The government-backed initiative is a nationwide campaign to grow environmental youth social action and support a series of activities for young people to connect with, protect and enhance nature. This includes appointing young ambassadors to drive environmental action in their communities and encourage environmental volunteering such as litter picking, planting pollinator-friendly flowers or fundraising to maintain or enhance green spaces.

20-year-old #iwill Ambassador Nayha Patel said:

Young people, like me, are pivotal in initiating the cycle of change to improve the environment for the future. The Year of Green Action and #iwill4nature together will connect, engage and challenge people, in particular children and young people, throughout the country to ensure we make our natural world a better place. The views and energy of young people will be key to achieving this.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want every child to have the best possible start in life and grow up healthy and happy. This £10 million investment will ensure even more children can enjoy the many benefits of discovering nature, from improved mental wellbeing to better physical health.

It builds on our recently published 'passport' of enrichment activities, designed to inspire children to explore the outdoors and make the most of the world around them.

Notes:

The children and nature funding was first announced in the 25 Year Environment Plan and has been awarded to the following delivery partners:

- Resilience through Nature, a consortium of [The Wildlife Trusts](#), YoungMinds, [Groundwork](#), the Sensory Trust and Field Studies Council, have been appointed to the Nature Friendly Schools project which will help deliver greener grounds and pupil visits to green spaces for schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
- [Social Farms and Gardens](#), working with Thrive, will deliver the Growing Care Farming project which aims to achieve a transformational change in the scale, scope and uptake of care farming services in England for children and adults with a defined health, education or social need particularly those from disadvantaged areas.
- Community Forests and Woodland Outreach project: to be awarded