

## [News story: Education Secretary urges more faith schools to consider academy conversion](#)

Faith leaders are being encouraged to convert more of their schools to academies – joining hundreds of schools across the country already benefiting from higher standards after academy conversion and building on the leading role faith groups have played in delivering the Government's education reforms.

At a round-table of representatives from all major faiths held on 29 January, the Education Secretary Damian Hinds set out the benefits of becoming an academy school – placing freedom into the hands of school leaders and helping schools to work together to achieve more than they can alone.

The Education Secretary also praised the role faith organisations have had in the Government's education reforms since 2010, with more than a quarter of state-funded faith schools already having academy status and more than 100 faith free schools open or due to open soon. The figures reflect an upturn in the pace of academy conversion within faith groups, with more groups now also establishing their own multi academy trusts.

The department would also like to see more people from faith groups choosing to join the thousands of volunteers already offering their time, energy, skills and expertise as school governors and trustees.

Mr Hinds said:

The diversity of schools in this country is one of our education system's most valuable assets, and faith schools play a pivotal role in that. They have led the way in embracing our reforms, with innovative free schools and high performing academies, taking advantage of the freedom and autonomy those choices provide.

Faith schools make up one-third of the schools in England. I want to see even more faith schools enjoying the benefits of academy conversion, with even more faith groups using the exciting opportunity the free schools route provides. In doing so, the leaders of these schools will ensure they are the ones making the right decisions for their pupils and for their communities, as I firmly believe they should be.

The meeting followed the news that more than 50% of children in state-funded schools in England are now taught in an academy or free school, with standards rising faster in many sponsored academies than in similar council-run schools.

Standards in faith schools are also impressive, with last year's GCSE data showing faith schools perform better than their non-faith counterparts, while over half of the top performing 5% of schools at Key Stage 2, are faith schools.

Representatives from all major faiths attended the meeting, including individuals from the Church of England, Muslim, Catholic, Sikh, Jewish and Hindu faiths, and from the Methodist Church.

They were joined by leaders of high performing faith multi-academy trusts – Hamid Patel of Star Academy Trust, Nitesh Gor of Avanti Schools Trust and Dr Brinder Mohan Singh of Nishkam School Trust.

These trusts are just three examples of faith groups combining their own ethos and values with the freedom and autonomy that academies and free schools enjoy, to create thriving schools providing the education their pupils deserve.

Director of the Catholic Education Service, Paul Barber, said:

The Catholic Church has been a longstanding Government partner in the provision of education, and today's meeting highlights the continued strong working relationship we enjoy with the Department.

Nearly a quarter of all Catholic schools in England are academies and we welcome the continued support of the Secretary of State for Catholic dioceses and their academisation plans.

As the country's second largest provider of schools, we remain committed to providing high quality Catholic education centred around the formation of the whole child.

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## **[Press release: Newton Fund supports 4 projects on flooding and drought in SEA](#)**

Hydrometeorological hazards pose a direct threat to lives and livelihoods of people living in South East Asia, from death and injury to damaged or destroyed homes, businesses, transport links, power supplies and agricultural land. Climate change and population growth are increasing the number of people at risk, and changes in land-use and the expansion of urban areas has led to a shift in how floods and droughts impact communities.

With support from the Newton Fund, the Natural Environment Research Council

(NERC), the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) are pleased to announce four joint projects looking into impacts of flooding and drought. These projects are expected to kick off in 2019 and will run for 30 to 36 months.

[Valuing the benefits of blue/green infrastructure for flood resilience, natural capital and urban development in Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Tobias Borger, University of St Andrews and Dr Van Giai Phong Tran, Hue University

[Comp-Flood: Compound flooding in coastal Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Ivan Haigh, University of Southampton and Dr Nguyen Nghia Hung, Southern Institute of Water Resource

[Slow Onset Hazard Interactions with Enhanced Drought and Flood Extremes in an At-Risk Mega-Delta](#)

Lead Investigators: Professor Stephen Darby, University of Southampton and Dr Nguyen Ngoc Huy, National Center for Water Resources Planning and Investigation

[An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Past, Present and Future Flood Risk in Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Jeffrey Neal, University of Bristol and Dr Nam Khanh Pham, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City

This bilateral programme between Vietnam and the UK is a component in the joint programme among NERC, ESRC and five partner countries in South East Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. A total of 18 projects will be supported with the hope to improve understanding of the impacts of these hazards in the region.

NERC Associate Director of Research Ned Garnett said: "To increase resilience in countries prone to hydrometeorological hazards, we need to gain a better understanding of the likely environmental and social impacts. This programme of research will deliver this understanding enabling the development and implementation of effective adaptation and mitigation measures. For example, helping local communities to design effective flood defences or restore natural defences, such as mangroves."

For more information, please visit [NERC](#) and [NAFOSTED](#) websites.

## **Note to Editors**

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the UK's main agency for funding and managing research, training and knowledge exchange in the environmental sciences. Our work covers the full range of atmospheric, Earth, biological, terrestrial and aquatic science, from the deep oceans to the upper atmosphere and from the poles to the equator. We coordinate some of the

world's most exciting research projects, tackling major environmental issues such as climate change, environmental influences on human health, the genetic make-up of life on Earth, and much more. NERC is part of UK Research & Innovation, a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government.

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. They also develop and train the UK's future social scientists. Their research informs public policies and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. Most importantly, it makes a real difference to all our lives. The ESRC is a member of UK Research & Innovation.

The National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) was established in February 2008 under the Government's Decree. NAFOSTED's establishment and operation is evaluated as one of the important imprints in the renovation process of science and technology management mechanism. NAFOSTED plays an active role in promoting scientific research activities nationwide as well as bilateral cooperation with foreign countries.

The Newton Fund builds research and innovation partnerships with 17 partner countries to support their economic development and social welfare, and to develop their research and innovation capacity for long-term sustainable growth. It has a total UK Government investment of £735 million up until 2021, with matched resources from the partner countries. The Newton Fund is managed by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and delivered through 7 UK delivery partners.

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## **[Speech: Maintaining commitment to Kuwait's security since 1899: speech by Michael Davenport](#)**

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah; Your Excellency Deputy Head of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah; Your Excellency Minister

of Information, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammed Nasser Abdullah Al-Jabri; Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Her Majesty's government I should like to express our heartfelt thanks to the government of the State of Kuwait, and to their Excellencies the Deputy PM and the Minister for Information personally, for hosting today's event to mark the anniversary of the first treaty between our two countries, signed on this very day 120 years ago.

This treaty, kept secret at the time, was enormously significant for both our countries. It was in fact, according to contemporary records, the first formal engagement ever executed between a ruler of Kuwait and the government of any country.

Only days after the signing of the treaty, on 4th February 1899, the British government issued instructions to deploy naval force to prevent an attack on Kuwait. And in the 120 years since 1899 Britain has maintained a lasting commitment to Kuwait's security.

Britain's intervention in defence of Kuwait in 1920 also marked the first ever overseas deployment of the newly formed Royal Air Force.

The British commitment to Kuwait continued beyond Kuwait's independence in 1961. In that very year Britain responded to His Highness the then Amir's request for military support, fulfilling its enduring commitment to Kuwait by deploying armed forces amounting to half of a brigade under Operation Vantage.

When your country was invaded, overrun and occupied by Iraq in August 1990 Britain under PM Margaret Thatcher played a leading role in securing a UN mandate for an international coalition to be formed for the liberation of Kuwait.

Britain was proud to be a member of that international coalition. And we are proud to this day of our armed forces who served bravely alongside coalition and Kuwaiti friends and succeeded in restoring Kuwait's sovereignty and independence. I am especially pleased that Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer, Defence Senior Adviser to the ME, is with us today in recognition of our continuing commitment to Kuwait.

Our two countries have changed radically since 1899. That was the year in which the first motor bus hit the streets of London. Britain moved closer to the Continent when the first radio signal was transmitted across the English Channel. Kuwait's economy was of course dependent on trade, especially with India, and pearl diving. Some things do not change, however. Especially generous Kuwaiti hospitality. Stuart Knox was the first Political Agent to be appointed to Kuwait after the 1899 treaty. What he reported back sounds very familiar – "My private reception", he wrote, "has been most kind and cordial. The Sheikh has set aside large rooms for me and my servants. He insists on feeding me – and my servants – while I am staying with him... The feeding is distinctly good !"

Kuwaiti-British relations stretch back, of course, way beyond 1899, well into the 18th century. When the British East India Company ran into difficulty with the Ottomans in Basra it should come as no surprise that Kuwait, with its openness to trade and its excellent natural harbour, should have offered an attractive refuge.

But the 1899 treaty ushered in a period of extraordinary expansion in the relations between our two countries and peoples. Throughout the 20th century and right up to this day.

Our leaders sealed these relations through historic visits: notably Viceroy of India Lord Curzon in 1903, shortly before the political agency was established; HH Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who visited London just after the First World War; and in more recent times the state visits by HM Queen Elizabeth II and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In recent decades Britain has become a home from home for many Kuwaitis. Many Kuwaitis I meet seem to know London much better than I do! Kuwaitis invest in properties all over the United Kingdom not just in London, and there are now more Kuwaitis studying at British universities than ever before. Indeed more Kuwaitis are now travelling to Britain than ever before.

In 1952, Britain was poised for an extended period of economic growth. But with rationing and shortages still in place after the Second World War, that seemed far from obvious. So Kuwait's decision in that year to establish the Kuwait Investment Office in smog-bound London, was a resounding vote of confidence in the United Kingdom as a sound place to invest.

The KIO was the first such office of any Sovereign Wealth Fund, later managing Kuwait's investments right across Europe. And Kuwait's investments in the UK, from both the KIO and the private sector, have continued to grow exponentially since then. We warmly welcome and encourage further such investment because it is both responsible and for the long term.

A key outcome of the State Visit to Britain by HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah in 2012 was the establishment of a new framework for our bilateral relations in the form of the Joint Steering Group, as part of my Government's new Gulf Strategy.

This Joint Steering Group – or JSG – is helping us to deepen our co-operation in those areas where we are already working together – and to broaden our co-operation in pastures new.

The JSG has helped us to deepen our defence and security co-operation. In the year ahead our armed forces will be exercising and training together more than ever before. We are close allies in the international Counter-Daesh Coalition.

At a government to government level we are working together in highly sensitive areas, for example to safeguard passengers flying out of our airports and to protect the integrity of our data and communications against

cyber attacks.

Last week's visit by the Lord Mayor of the City of London highlighted new opportunities in trade and investment – in both directions – including in support of His Highness the Amir's exciting new plans for Hareer Territory, in pursuit of Kuwait's Vision 2035.

We are sorry not to have HE the Minister for Education & Higher Education with us today, but I am happy that this is because he is attending the Education World Forum in London, where he is also holding consultations on co-operation in the area of curriculum reform.

And in the cultural sphere the 120th anniversary has helped to stimulate fresh co-operation in music and the arts between the British Council and the National Council for Arts and Literature. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra will be making its first ever visit to Kuwait in April to perform at the remarkable Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre. Britain and Kuwait enjoy distinguished and exceptionally special relations. Many of us are witness to this every day. Our duty and our challenge will be to ensure that our relations endure to keep pace with regional and global developments, and that they are fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

We are well placed together to fulfil this duty and to meet such a challenge side by side. Not only do we have a strong bond of friendship. This is matched by a close and rare identity of interests and values, which helps to strengthen our co-operation in many fields. Whether in the UN Security Council, where we are delighted to be working with our Kuwaiti colleagues. Or tackling global environmental challenges, such as the menace of marine pollution. Or working together to bring security and stability to this precious but troubled region.

So I feel confident in wishing our two countries not only a happy anniversary, but also a further 120 years of partnership and friendship, well into the next century!

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## **Speech: PM statement to the House of Commons: 29 January 2019**

On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

A fortnight ago, this House clearly rejected the proposed Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration with just 202 Members voting in favour.

Tonight a majority of Honourable Members have said they would support a deal with changes to the backstop. Combined with measures to address concerns over Parliament's role in the negotiation of the future relationship and

commitments on workers' rights, in law where need be, it is now clear that there is a route that can secure a substantial and sustainable majority in this House for leaving the EU with a deal.

We will now take this mandate forward and seek to obtain legally binding changes to the Withdrawal Agreement that deal with concerns on the backstop while guaranteeing no return to a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. My colleagues and I will talk to the EU about how we address the House's views.

As I said this afternoon, there is limited appetite for such a change in the EU and negotiating it will not be easy. But in contrast to a fortnight ago, this House has made it clear what it needs to approve a Withdrawal Agreement.

Many Honourable Members have said that the continuing protection of workers' rights after Brexit is something that needs to be strengthened, and my Right Honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business will intensify our work with Honourable Members from across the House and the trade unions this week.

And my Right Honourable friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will do the same on how we engage this House further in our approach to negotiating our future partnership with the EU.

As well as making clear what changes it needs to approve the Withdrawal agreement, the House has also reconfirmed its view that it does not want to leave the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement and Future Framework.

I agree that we should not leave without a deal. However, simply opposing no deal is not enough to stop it.

The Government will now redouble its efforts to get a deal that this House can support and to that end I want to invite my Right Honourable Friend the Member for Meriden, the Honourable Member for Birmingham Erdington, and all those that tabled amendments in opposition to No Deal to discuss how we can deliver that by securing a deal.

In light of the defeat of the Right Honourable Member the Leader of the Opposition's amendment I again invite him to take up my offer of the meeting to see if we can find a way forward.

Mr Speaker, if this House can come together we can deliver the decision the British people took in June 2016, restore faith in our democracy and get on with building a country that works for everyone.

And as Prime Minister I will work with Members across this House to do just that.

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# News story: Boost for national mission to improve early literacy and language

Parents who lack confidence with supporting their young children's early learning at home will benefit from projects being pledged by businesses around the country.

These will range from bookswaps in supermarkets and author ambassadors, to special training for staff in shoe shops.

Oxford University Press and HarperCollins are among businesses joining a roundtable discussion chaired by Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi today (29 November), adding to almost 100 businesses, charities and public sector organisations who coming together to tackle the 'last taboo' in education, the home learning environment.

There are hundreds of educational apps on the market for parents to choose from when supporting their children's learning using mobile phones or tablets, but little advice about their quality. To help tackle this, the Department for Education will bring together a new advisory panel to assess existing apps, producing tips and guidance for parents on how to use them to aid their child's learning, and to help them make informed decisions about which have the most educational value.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want to create a generation of confident learners who can read and communicate effectively – these are vital skills that children need to grasp from the earliest opportunity in order to succeed.

There's no instruction manual for being a parent. For some who left school a long time ago or who have low confidence in their own abilities, it can be overwhelming to know where to start with supporting children's learning at home before they start school – and we know that too many children are arriving at school already behind their peers.

By working with a growing number of businesses, charities and experts, we're making it easier for parents to kickstart this early development – helping to take forward our national mission to boost children's early development. New projects are being set up all over the country and our expert panel will create trusted tools that parents can be confident using, so that every child develops the skills they need to thrive.

Representatives from eight organisations including the Lego Group, Clarks, EasyPeasy, HarperCollins, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), British Land, Oxford University Press and KPMG attended the roundtable, led

by the National Literacy Trust's Chief Executive Jonathan Douglas, the next step in the Government's campaign to tackle concerning rates of early literacy and communication among disadvantaged families.

It builds on the Education Secretary Damian Hinds' [ambition](#) set out in July last year to halve the proportion of five-year-olds not meeting expected standards in these skills by the time they finish Reception.

The nine businesses join others already involved in work to support parents with improving the home learning environment. These include Addo Foods and HarperCollins, whose projects in this area will range from upskilling their own staff to improve their interaction with disadvantaged families, to providing tools and resources that encourage parents to incorporate reading and communication in everyday activities.

Pledges from businesses already signed up include:

- Clarks – where its 6,500 staff will be trained in children's speech, language and communication development and how to engage with families in stores across the country;
- HarperCollins – driving a love of reading through author ambassadors, book donations and grants for independent bookshops to support events targeted at children under five and their parents;
- Addo Foods – supporting its employees with children aged 0 to five to use its language lab facilities at its Nottingham headquarters to encourage improved communication skills;
- WHSmiths – supporting literacy programmes in Swindon, where there are high levels of illiteracy, including bringing parents into nurseries to help advise on how to support their child's literacy and language development; and
- British Land and Penguin Random House – working together to provide high-quality children's books for bookswap schemes launching in three British Land retail sites, building on British Land's work to reach more than 34,000 primary school children to improve their literacy.

Analysis from the National Literacy Trust suggests that 7.1 million adults in the UK have very poor literacy skills, so pledges focused on improving the training available to adult employees, particularly those who are parents, will play a key role in boosting literacy and language skills among young children.

Professor Jackie Marsh, Chair of the advisory panel, said:

I am delighted to take on the role of Chair of the panel on early years, language, literacy and communication apps. Young children are immersed in a digital world from their earliest years and have access to many apps on tablets and smartphones.

There is a need to identify the features of high quality apps that support their learning and to offer parents, carers and teachers guidance on how to select and use apps effectively. The government

has rightly identified this as a priority and I look forward to working with the members of the panel on undertaking this important task.

#### Further information

The new advisory panel will consist of:

- Professor Jackie Marsh, Chair: Professor of Education at the University of Sheffield and a leading figure in children's digital literacy;
- Olivia Dickinson, Deputy Chair: Digital consultant specialising in children's and educational digital media, with experience working for Nickelodeon, BBC, Discovery Education, Sky Kids and Amazon;
- Peter Robinson: Global Head of Research and Company Director of Dubit Limited, specialising in digital entertainment and education for children;
- Antonio Gould: Executive Director of Teach Monster Games, a not-for-profit education technology company responsible for the 'Teach Your Monster To Read' app, boasting a monthly reach of more than one million children;
- Dr Rosie Flewitt: Co-Head of Research, Department of Learning and Leadership at UCL Institute of Education and Co-Director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy, with 20 years' experience in early communication, literacy and language research;
- Sandra Mathers: a former primary teacher and now Senior Researcher at the University of Oxford, with expertise in child learning and development, including the ways in which this can be supported through technology;
- Jonathan Douglas: Director of the National Literacy Trust, responsible for the Trust's 'Literacy Apps' resource for parents and teachers, and a key advocate of the Government's work to improve the Home Learning Environment; and
- Jane Lewis: Head of Programme Development and Quality at Save the Children UK. She is responsible for programme development and innovation, focused on the home learning environment and supporting parents' engagement in their children's early education.